

Summery: Eidetic Memory, fondly known as photographic memory, is the ability of a human brain to remember past events and feelings perfectly, as if the memory had happened just yesterday. What if Harry Potter had this ability? This gift, this curse. This one small change, plus a few others will pave the way for Harry Potter as he becomes the greatest wizard since Merlin.

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or its character, those belong to J.K. Rowling.

A/N: This first chapter is in fact the first chapter in The Sorcerer's Stone, with the exception of the last sentence. It is not nessecary for you to read if you do not want to, merely used as a placeholder for my story.

Book 1: Harry Potter and the Memories of The Past

Prologue: Perfectly Un-normal

XoX

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Private Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

Mr. Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills. He was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large mustache. Mrs. Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came to be very useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the neighbors. The Dursley's had a small son called Dudley and in their opinion there was no finer boy anywhere.

The Dursleys had everything they wanted, but they also had a secret, and their greatest fear was that somebody would discover it. They didn't think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs. Potter was Mrs. Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs. Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister, because her sister and her good-for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was possible to be. The Dursleys shuddered to think what the neighbors would say if the Potters arrived in the street. The Dursleys knew that the Potters had a small son, too, but they

had never seen him. this boy was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want Dudley mixing with a child like that.

When Mr. and Mrs. Dursley woke up on the dull, gray Tuesday our story starts, there was nothing about the cloudy sky outside to suggest that strange and mysterious things would soon be happening all over the country. Mr. Dursley hummed as he picked out his most boring tie for work, and Mrs. Dursley gossiped away happily as she wrestled a screaming Duddley into his high chair.

None of them noticed a large, tawny owl flutter past the window.

At half past eight, Mr. Dursley picked up his briefcase, pecked Mrs. Dursley on the cheek, and tried to kiss Duddley good-bye but missed because Duddley was now having a tantrum and throwing cereal at the walls. "Little tyke," chortled Mr. Dursley as he left the house. He got into his car and backed out of number four's drive.

It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of something peculiar – a cat reading a map. For a second, Mr. Dursley didn't realize what he had seen – then he jerked his head around to look again. There was a tabby cat standing on the corner of Private Drive, but there wasn't a map in sight. What could he have been thinking of? It must have been a trick of the light. Mr. Dursley blinked and stared at the cat. It stared back. As Mr. Dursley drove around the corner and up the road, he watched the cat in his mirror. It was now reading the sign that said Private Drive – no, looking at the sign; cats couldn't read maps or signs. Mr. Dursley gave himself a little shake and put the cat out of his mind. As he drove toward town he thought of nothing except a large order of drills he was hoping to get that day.

But on the edge of town, drills were driven out of his mind by something else. As he sat in the usual morning traffic jam, he couldn't help but noticing that there seemed to be a lot of strangely dressed people about. People in cloaks. Mr. Dursley couldn't bear people who dressed in funny clothes – the getups you saw on young people! He supposed this was some stupid new fashion. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel and his eyes fell on a huddle of weirdos standing quite close by. They were whispering excitedly together. Mr. Dursley was enraged to see that a couple of them weren't young at all; why, that man had to be older than he

was, and wearing an emerald-green cloak! The nerve of him! but then it struck Mr. Dursley that this was probably some silly stunt – these people were obviously collecting for something...yes, that would be it. The traffic moved on and a few minutes later, Mr. Dursley arrived in the Grunnings parking lot, his mind back on drills.

Mr. Dursley always sat with his back to the window in his office on the ninth floor. If he hadn't, he might have found it harder to concentrate on drills that morning. He didn't see the owls swooping past in broad daylight, though people down in the street did; they pointed and gazed open-mouthed as owl after owl sped overhead. Most of them had never seen an owl even at nighttime. Mr. Dursley, however, had a perfectly normal, owl-free morning. He yelled at different people. He made several important telephone calls and shouted a bit more. He was in a very good mood until lunchtime, when he thought he'd stretch his legs and walk across the road to buy himself a bun from the bakery.

He'd forgotten all about the people in cloaks until he passed a group of them next to the baker's. he eued them angrily as he passed. He didn't know why, but they made him uneasy. This bunch were whispering excitedly, too, and he couldn't see a single collecting tin. It was on his way back past them, clutching a large doughnut in a bag, that he caught a few words of what they were saying.

"The Potters, that's right, that's what I heard –"

"- yes, their son, Harry –"

Mr. Dursley stopped dead. Fear flooded him. he looked back at the whisperers as if he wanted to say something to them, but thought better of it.

He dashed back across the road, hurried up to his office, snapped at his secretary not to disturb him, seized his telephone, and almost finished dialing his home number when he changed his mind. He put the receiver back down and stroked his mustache, thinking...no, he was being stupid. Potter wasn't such an unusual name. he was sure there were lots of people called Potter who had a son called Harry. Come to think of it, he wasn't even sure his nephew was called Harry. He'd never even seen the boy. it might have been Harcey. Or Harold. There was no point in worrying Mrs. Dursley; she always got

so upset at any mention of her sister. He didn't blame her – if he'd had a sister like that...but all the same, those people in cloaks...

He found it a lot harder to concentrate on drills that afternoon and when he left the building at five o'clock, he was still so worried that he walked straight into someone just outside the door.

"Sorry," he grunted, as the tiny old man stumbled and almost fell. It was a few seconds before Mr. Dursley realized that the man was wearing a violet cloak. He didn't seem at all upset at being almost knocked to the ground. On the contrary, his face split into a wide smile and he said in a squeaky voice that made passersby stare, "Don't be sorry, my dear sir, for nothing could upset me today! Rejoice, for You-Know-Who has gone at last! Even Muggles like yourself should be celebrating, this happy, happy day!"

And the old man hugged Mr. Dursley around the middle and walked off.

Mr. Dursley stood rooted to the spot. He had been hugged by a complete stranger. He also thought he had been called a Muggle, whatever that was. He was rattled. He hurried to his car and set off for home, hoping he was imagining things, which he had never hoped before, because he didn't approve of imagination.

As he pulled into the Driveway of number four, the first thing he saw – and it didn't improve his mood – was the tabby cat he'd spotted earlier that morning. It was now sitting on his garden wall. He was sure it was the same one; it had the same markings around its eyes.

"Shoo!" said Mr. Dursley loudly.

The cat didn't move. It gave him a stern look. Was this normal cat behavior? Mr. Dursley wondered. Trying to pull himself together, he let himself into the house. He was still determined not to mention anything to his wife.

Mrs. Dursley had had a nice, normal day. She told him over dinner all about Mrs. Next Door's problems with her daughter and how Dudley had learned a new word ("Won't!"). Mr. Dursley tried to act normally. When Dudley had been put to bed, he went into the living room in time to catch the last report on the evening news:

"And finally, bird-watchers everywhere have reported that the nations owls have been behaving very unusually today. Although owls normally hunt at night and are hardly ever seen in daylight, there have been hundreds of sightings of these birds flying in every direction since sunrise. Experts are unable to explain why the owls have suddenly changed their sleeping pattern" The newscaster allowed himself a grin. "Most mysterious. And now, over to Jim McGuffin with the weather. Going to be any more showers of owls tonight Jim?"

"Well, Ted," said the weather man, "I don't know about that, but it's not only the owls that have been acting oddly today. Viewers as far as Kent, Yorkshire, and Dundee have been phoning in to tell me that instead of the rain I promised yesterday, they've had a downpour of shooting stars! Perhaps people have been celebrating Bonfire Night early – it's not until next week, folks! But I can promise a wet night tonight."

Mr. Dursley sat frozen in his armchair. Shooting stars all over Britain? Owls in daylight? Mysterious people in cloaks all over the place? And a whisper, a whisper about the Potters...

Mrs. Dursley came into the living room carrying two cups of tea. It was no good. He'd have to say something to her. He cleared his throat nervously. "Er – Petunia, dear – you haven't heard from your sister lately, have you?"

As he had expected, Mrs. Dursley looked shocked and angry. After all, they normally pretended she didn't have a sister.

"No," she said sharply. "Why?"

"Funny stuff on the news," Mr. Dursley mumbled. "Owls...shooting stars...and there were a lot of funny-looking people in town today..."

"So?" snapped Mrs. Dursley.

"Well, I just thought...maybe...it was something to do with...you know...her crowd."

Mrs. Dursley sipped her tea through pursed lips. Mr. Dursley wondered whether he dared tell her he'd heard the name "Potter."

He decided he didn't dare. Instead he said, as casually as he could, "Their son – he'd be about Dudley's age now, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Dursley stiffly.

"What's his name again? Howard, isn't it?"

"Harry. Nasty, common name, if you ask me."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Dursley, his heart sinking horribly. "Yes, I quite agree."

He didn't say another word on the subject as they went upstairs to bed. While Mrs. Dursley was in the bathroom, Mr. Dursley crept to the bedroom window and peered down into the front garden. The cat was still there. It was staring down Private Drive as though it were waiting for something.

Was he imagining things? Could all this have anything to do with the Potters? If it did...if it got out that they were related to a pair of – well, he didn't think he could bear it.

The Dursleys got into bed. Mrs. Dursley fell asleep quickly but Mr. Dursley lay awake, turning it all over in his mind. His last thought before he fell asleep was that even if the Potters were involved, there was no reason for them to come near him and Mrs. Dursley. The Potters knew very well what he and Petunia thought about them and their kind...He couldn't see how he and Petunia could get mixed up in anything that might be going on – he yawned and turned over – it couldn't affect them...

He had no idea just how wrong he was.

Mr. Dursley might have been drifting into an uneasy sleep, but the cat on the wall outside was showing no sign of sleepiness. It was sitting as still as a statue, its eyes fixed unblinkingly on the far corner of Private Drive. It didn't so much as quiver when a car door slammed on the next street, nor when two owls swooped overhead. In fact, it was nearly midnight before the cat moved at all.

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A man appeared on the corner the cat had been watching, appeared so suddenly and silently you'd have thought he's just popped out of the ground. The cat's tail twitched and its eyes narrowed.

Nothing like this man had ever been seen on Private Drive. He was tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright, and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore didn't seem to realize that he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome. He was busy rummaging in his cloak, looking for something. But he did seem to realize he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly and saw a cat sitting near the entrance of one of the houses, which was staring at him from the other end of the street. For some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and muttered, "I should have known."

He found what he was looking for in his inside pocket. It seemed to be a silver cigarette lighter. He flicked it open, held it up in the air, and clicked it. The nearest street lamp went out with a little pop.

He clicked it again - the next lamp flickered into darkness. Twelve times he clicked the Put-Outer, until the only lights left on the whole street were two tiny pinpricks in the distance, which were the eyes of the cat watching him. If anyone looked out of their window now, they wouldn't be able to see anything that was happening down on the pavement. Dumbledore slipped the Put-Outer back inside his cloak and set off down the street toward number four, where he sat down on the wall next to the cat. He didn't look at it, but after a moment he spoke to it.

"Fancy seeing you here Professor McGonagall."

He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes. She, too, was wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black

hair was drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled. "How did you know it was me?" she asked.

"My dear Professor, I've never seen a cat sit so stiffly."

"You'd be stiff if you'd been sitting on a brick wall all day," said Professor McGonagall.

"All day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed a dozen feasts and parties on my way here."

Professor McGonagall sniffed angrily.

"Oh yes, everyone's celebrating, all right," she said impatiently. "You'd think they'd be a bit more careful, but no - even the Muggles have noticed something's going on. It was on their news." She jerked her head back at the house with a number four on its door. "I heard it. Flocks of owls... shooting stars... Well, they're not completely stupid. They were bound to notice something. Shooting stars down in Kent - I'll bet that was Dedalus Diggle. He never had much sense."

"You can't blame them," said Dumbledore gently. "We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years."

"I know that," said Professor McGonagall irritably. "But that's no reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes, swapping rumors."

She threw a sharp, sideways glance at Dumbledore here, as though hoping he was going to tell her something, but he didn't, so she went on. "A fine thing it would be if, on the very day you know-Who seems to have disappeared at last, the Muggles found out about us all. I suppose he really has gone, Dumbledore?"

"It certainly seems so," said Dumbledore. "We have much to be thankful for. Would you care for a lemon drop?"

"A what?"

"A lemon drop. They're a kind of Muggle sweet I'm rather fond of"



"No, thank you," said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn't think this was the moment for lemon drops. "As I say, even if You-Know-Who has gone -"

"My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name? All this 'You- Know-Who' nonsense - for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name: Voldemort." Professor McGonagall flinched, but Dumbledore, who was unsticking two lemon drops, seemed not to notice. "It all gets so confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who.' I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name.

"I know you haven't," said Professor McGonagall, sounding half exasperated, half admiring. "But you're different. Everyone knows you're the only one you-Know- oh, all right, Voldemort, was frightened of."

"You flatter me," said Dumbledore calmly. "Voldemort had powers I will never have."

"Only because you're too - well - noble to use them."

"It's lucky it's dark. I haven't blushed so much since Madam Pomfrey told me she liked my new earmuffs."

Professor McGonagall shot a sharp look at Dumbledore and said, "The owls are nothing next to the rumors that are flying around. You know what everyone's saying? About why he's disappeared? About what finally stopped him?"

It seemed that Professor McGonagall had reached the point she was most anxious to discuss, the real reason she had been waiting on a cold, hard wall all day, for neither as a cat nor as a woman had she fixed Dumbledore with such a piercing stare as she did now. It was plain that whatever "everyone" was saying, she was not going to believe it until Dumbledore told her it was true. Dumbledore, however, was choosing another lemon drop and did not answer.

"What they're saying," she pressed on, "is that last night Voldemort turned up in Godric's Hollow. He went to find the Potters. The rumor is that Lily and James Potter are - are - that they're - dead. "

Dumbledore bowed his head. Professor McGonagall gasped. "Lily and James... I can't believe it... I didn't want to believe it... Oh, Albus..."

Dumbledore reached out and patted her on the shoulder. "I know... I know..." he said heavily.

Professor McGonagall's voice trembled as she went on. "That's not all. They're saying he tried to kill the Potter's son, Harry. But – he couldn't. He couldn't kill that little boy. No one knows why, or how, but they're saying that when he couldn't kill Harry Potter, Voldemort's power somehow broke - and that's why he's gone.

Dumbledore nodded glumly.

"It's - it's true?" faltered Professor McGonagall. "After all he's done... all the people he's killed... he couldn't kill a little boy? It's just astounding... of all the things to stop him... but how in the name of heaven did Harry survive?"

"We can only guess," said Dumbledore. "We may never know."

Professor McGonagall pulled out a lace handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes beneath her spectacles. Dumbledore gave a great sniff as he took a golden watch from his pocket and examined it. It was a very odd watch. It had twelve hands but no numbers; instead, little planets were moving around the edge. It must have made sense to Dumbledore, though, because he put it back in his pocket and said, "Hagrid's late. I suppose it was he who told you I'd be here, by the way?"

"Yes," said Professor McGonagall. "And I don't suppose you're going to tell me why you're here, of all places?" "I've come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle. They're the only family he has left now."

"You don't mean - you can't mean the people who live here?" cried Professor McGonagall, jumping to her feet and pointing at number four.

"Dumbledore - you can't. I've been watching them all day. You couldn't find two people who are less like us. And they've got this son - I saw him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets. Harry Potter come and live here!"

"It's the best place for him," said Dumbledore firmly. "His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he's older. I've written them a letter."

"A letter?" repeated Professor McGonagall faintly, sitting back down on the wall. "Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a letter? These people will never understand him! He'll be famous – a legend - I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter day in the future - there will be books written about Harry - every child in our world will know his name!"

"Exactly," said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top of his half-moon glasses. "It would be enough to turn any boy's head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won't even remember! Can't you see how much better off he'll be, growing up away from all that until he's ready to take it?"

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and then said, "Yes - yes, you're right, of course. But how is the boy getting here, Dumbledore?" She eyed his cloak suddenly as though she thought he might be hiding Harry underneath it.

"Hagrid's bringing him."

"You think it - wise - to trust Hagrid with something as important as this?"

"I would trust Hagrid with my life," said Dumbledore.

"I'm not saying his heart isn't in the right place," said Professor McGonagall grudgingly, "but you can't pretend he's not careless. He does tend to - what was that?"

A low rumbling sound had broken the silence around them. It grew steadily louder as they looked up and down the street for some sign of a headlight; it swelled to a roar as they both looked up at the sky – and a huge motorcycle fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of them.

If the motorcycle was huge, it was nothing to the man sitting astride it. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so wild – long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets.

"Hagrid," said Dumbledore, sounding relieved. "At last. And where did you get that motorcycle?"

"Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sir," said the giant, climbing carefully off the motorcycle as he spoke. "Young Sirius Black lent it to me. I've got him, sir."

"No problems, were there?"

"No, sir - house was almost destroyed, but I got him out all right before the Muggles started swarmin' around. He fell asleep as we was flyin' over Bristol."

Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.

"Is that where -?" whispered Professor McGonagall.

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "He'll have that scar forever."

"Couldn't you do something about it, Dumbledore?"

"Even if I could, I wouldn't. scars can come in handy. I have one myself above my left knee that is a perfect map of the London Underground. Well – give him here, Hagrid – we'd better get this over with."

Dumbledore took Harry in his arms and turned toward the Dursley's house.

"Could I – could I say good-bye to him, sir?" asked Hagrid. He bent his great, shaggy head over Harry and gave him what must have

been a very scratchy, whiskery kiss. Then, suddenly, Hagrid let out a howl like a wounded dog.

"Shhh!" hissed Professor McGonagall, "you'll wake the muggles!"

"S-s-sorry," sobbed Hagrid, taking out a large, handkerchief and burying his face in it. "But I c-c-can't stand it – Lily an' James dead – an' poor little Harry off ter live with Muggles –"

"Yes, yes, it's all very sad, but get a grip on yourself, Hagrid, or we'll be found," Professor McGonagall whispered, patting Hagrid gingerly on the arms as Dumbledore stepped over the low garden wall and walked to the front door. He laid Harry gently on the doorstep, took the letter out of his cloak, tucked it inside Harry's blanket, and then came back to the other two. For a full minute the three of them stood and looked at the little bundle; Hagrid's shoulders shook. Professor McGonagall blinked furiously, and the twinkling light that usually shone from Dumbledore's eyes seemed to have gone out.

"Well," said Dumbledore finally, "that's that. We've no business staying here. We may as well go and join the celebrations."

"Yeah," said Hagrid in a very muffled voice, "I'll be takin' Sirius his bike back. G'night, Professor McGonagall – Professor Dumbledore, sir."

Wiping his streaming eyes on his jacket sleeve, Hagrid swung himself onto the motorcycle and kicked the engine to life; with a roar it rose into the air and off into the night.

"I shall see you soon, I expect, Professor McGonagall," said Dumbledore, nodding to her. Professor McGonagall blew her nose in reply.

Dumbledore walked back down the street. On the corner he stopped and took out the silver Put-Outer. He clicked it once, and twelve balls of light sped back to the other end of the street. He could just see the bundle of blankets on the step of number four.

"Good luck, Harry," he murmured. He turned on his heel and with a swish of his cloak, he was gone.

Harry had no clue that the next several years of his life would be some of his worst. That he would be tormented by his cousin. That his Aunt and Uncle would do their best to isolate him and make him feel worthless. That they would try their best to beat the "freak" out of him.

And that they would fail so spectacularly it would almost seem laughable, were it not for the hardships.

He had no clue that one day, he would become one of the most powerful wizards in the world.

No one did.

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Not much to say about this, its really just the first chapter, taken straight from the book. I'm using it because this is when the story starts. I'm not even expecting any reviews, except for those to tell me I stole this from J.K. Rowling, because there wasn't anything different except for the end. The next chapter should already be up however, and it is different from J.K.'s. So fear not! Pokemaster12 has you covered!

## Chapter 1: Memories of a Time Since Past

XoX

"Hello my little Harry," a woman with fiery red hair and beautiful green eyes smiled at him. "How's my little man?"

He couldn't really understand what she was saying, but the feeling of warmth she gave was more than enough to cause a smile to appear on his face. He giggled as she began making faces at him, playing with his hands or tickling his feet. But as she continued he caught sight of a small flash and found himself staring at a small heart shaped pendent around her neck. It was very shiny, seeming to draw him in and he couldn't help but want it.

Suddenly, the pendant lifted itself around the woman's neck and made its way to him, allowing him to clutch on to it with his tiny hands.

The woman gave a surprised gasp that he ignored in favor of chewing on the shiny necklace, "James! James you have to come here and see this!"

A little ways over from them the door that led to the room opened and in walked a man with messy raven hair and brown mischievous eyes. "See what Lil's? Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing's wrong, but our little Harry just had his first bout of accidental magic," Lil's said excitedly.

"What?" James walked over to the two of them and looked at him. He stopped gnawing on the shiny pendant long enough to look up at the man, then went right on back to his previous activity. "You sure he did accidental magic Lil's? I mean, magic at his age is completely unheard of. He's only one."

"I know what I saw," Lil's said firmly. "Watch this," she gently pried the pendant out of his grasp, for a moment, he thought about crying, that usually seemed to get him what he wanted. But these two had always been nice to him ever since he first came to conscious thought, and gave him that warm feeling he loved so much, and they seemed to get distressed when he cried. He didn't want to cause them distress.

Instead he held out his hands again and reached out for that warm feeling that had allowed him to lift the pendant again. The pendant, once again slipped from around Lil's neck and floated into his waiting hand.

James blinked, opened his mouth, closed it, then blinked again. Finally, he said, "um...Lily, I don't think that was accidental. It seemed pretty deliberate to me."

Lily scoffed, "now who's sounding far-fetched. A one year old using wandless magic? Really James?"

James rubbed the back of his head, "well maybe this is natural for him. After all, the prophecy said he would defeat the Dark Lord. Maybe he's just super powerful." As if someone flipped a switch James began to gush and wiped crocodile tears from his eyes, "I'm so...proud...my son is going to be more powerful than Merlin! Just wait until I show him the ropes and get him all ready to go to Hogwarts!"

"James Potter! I will not have you teach my child to be a Delinquent like you and your Marauder friends!" Lily said in a scolding tone.

James was instantly cowed, "yes, dear."

The scene began to change, Lily and James disappeared and he was alone.

Shouting reached his ears.

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off!"

"Fool, you think you can defeat me without your wand? Avada Kadavera!"

The door burst open and Lily came in, barricading the entrance with any and every object in the room that could be moved. She then ran over to the crib he was in and moved in front of it. He wasn't sure what all the excitement was about but as soon as he saw the woman he reached out with his arms so she could hold him. She did, picking him up and holding him close, whispering words that he was



only now beginning to understand, words that comforted him in his ear as she rocked him back and forth.

Only a few seconds after she came in the door burst open, exploding and sending all of the objects that had been previously used as a barricade away. In walked a being that was more monster than anything. With pale, chalky white skin, a flat face with slit-like nostrils and red, malicious eyes.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!" Lily pleaded as she held him tighter.

The snake-man merely laughed and stalked forward. "Stand aside, you silly girl...stand aside,

now..." he hissed, his voice reflecting the snake-like quality of his face.

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead!" she begged.

"I won't tell you again, stand aside!" the snake-man ordered.

"Not Harry, please...have mercy...have mercy..." she was sobbing by now and he felt his heartstrings being pulled, the pretty woman who showed him love was in distress and he felt this terrible feeling settle in his stomach. He reached out and his tiny hands grabbed onto her shirt, trying to give her the same feeling she gave him.

"Stand aside!" the snake-man all but roared at Lily.

Lily turned, putting him back in his crib despite his gurgled protest. When he looked into her eyes he saw something different, she had been afraid before but now they were smoldering. She turned back around and glared defiantly at the Snake-man, "no."

"Foolish girl," the snake-man pointed the odd stick he had the people who gave him the warm feeling at Lily. "Avada Kadavera!"

There was a flash of green light that hit Lily, he watched as she fell to the floor and went still. He didn't know what happened, but somehow realized, instinctively, that the nice who loved it when he called her Mama wasn't coming back. He began to cry as the snake-man stalked up to his crib and stared at him cruelly.

"This is the child of prophecy," the snake-man snorted and pointed his wand at him. "No child will ever be a match for Lord Voldemort. Avada Kadavera!"

XoX

Brilliant green eyes opened up and Harry James Potter looked around the tiny room, frantic for a second, before realizing where he was. He placed his hands on his face and took several slow, shuddering breaths to ease his rapidly beating heart.

Turning his head and opening his eyes he looked around the room that had been his since he was six. It was small, the smallest room at the Dursley's household on number four, Private Drive in Surrey. Despite this, it was not lacking in quality materials. His bed while small, was made from a rich rosewood and had a dark, forest green bed spread. Next to the door was an armoire, and over to his left, right under the window, was a desk and chair, all of which were made from the same wood with the chair having inlaid bronze patterns along the back, the pattern he had remembered from the house in his memories.

His memories, unlike most people, Harry Potter had an eidetic memory, meaning he had the ability to recall images, sounds, sights, smells and events with extreme precision as if what he remembered had happened several seconds before. It was both his gift, and in many ways, his curse.

He shook the memories from the dream away, stowing them in the back of his mind where he kept all his memories. They rarely came to bother him these days, usually only when he had been too preoccupied with life to do his usual meditation did they ever come out. He had been gotten so enamored with his reading at the library last night that he had been forced to run home and went to bed without clearing his mind. He was thankful that the memories didn't cause him the same distress as they used to when he was younger, back when he didn't really understand what they were or what they meant.

He stood up and made his way over to the small closet at the other end of the room. Opening it he saw all of his clothes neatly organized by type and color. He grabbed a pair of black work-out

shorts and a sleeveless shirt before moving to a drawer near his bed and grabbing his socks. He put on his clothes, finishing off his outfit with some trainers and made his way downstairs. It was still early in the morning, around four o'clock, so he wouldn't be bothered by his relatives as he went out on his morning run.

Once he got outside Harry locked the door and did several stretches, then pressed a button on the new watch he had bought a few weeks ago to time himself before starting out on his morning run. It was a fairly beautiful day out, what with it still being spring, though summer would be coming soon. Harry made his way to the park, varying his speed from a light jog, to a full out sprint, going from a straight line, to zigzag patterns. When he reached the park he did some more stretches and then some exercises designed to increase his strength, endurance, flexibility and speed. Afterwards, he made his run back home.

Physically, not much had changed in the Dursleys home. The living room was almost identical to the night when Harry had been dropped on the Dursley's doorstep. Only the photographs on the mantelpiece really showed how much time had passed. Ten years ago, there had been lots of pictures of what looked like a large pink beach ball wearing different-colored bonnets – but Dudley Dursley was no longer a baby, and now the photographs showed a large blond pig-faced boy riding his first bicycle, on a carousel at the fair, playing a computer game with his father, being hugged and kissed by his mother. Like all things except Harry's bedroom, this room showed no sign of him even living there.

Entering the bathroom, Harry stripped his clothes off, turned on the water and spent ten minutes luxuriating in the feel of hot water running across his skin before he grabbed a bar of soap and scrubbed himself down. When he got out and toweled himself off he paused and took a look in the mirror.

At nearly eleven years of age, he was above average in height. His overall figure was what one would call wiry, he was still skinny, and likely always would be, but supplementing his slimmer figure were muscles he had gained from hard work and training. Some of his acquaintances had often likened his body to a cheetah, jaguar, or some other form of powerful, predatory feline, usually when he was doing athletics of some kind. His football coach was particularly fond of calling him 'black panther' due to how fast and gracefully he ran.

Aside from his rather impressive physic, for a ten going on eleven year old anyways, Harry had several scars that were on his back and chest. Most were nothing serious, his uncle had rarely done anything that could cause physical evidence of the damage he use to do, but there were a few on his back that he got from lashings with his uncle's belt. Of course, there was also the prominent scar on his forehead shaped in a lightning bolt, the scar he got when his parents died. He shrugged thoughts of his scars (Battle wounds, Harry often joked) off a second later and got into his room and changed into a set of snug black jeans, and a green shirt that matched his eyes.

He spent the next half an hour sitting down on his floor, in a cross legged position, with his eyes closed and his breathing slow and controlled.

Harry usually did this every day in order to help clear his thoughts so he could think without being inundated with random memories. It didn't keep them away, but meditation at least ensured that he would not be bothered by them. When he was finished the clock read six on the dot.

Finally finished, Harry made his into the kitchen. He grabbed several bowls and two pans from a cupboard, some eggs, milk, cheese and butter from the fridge, and flower and sugar from the pantry. He turned on the stove, put the two pans on different burners before placing a spoonful of butter on each. He started placing the ingredients in the bowl, cracking the eggs and mixing in the flower and milk, adding the sugar and some butter. As he worked in mixing the ingredients into a fine batter he hummed a little to himself.

He had learned to enjoy cooking in past five years, and had taken several cooking courses over one of his summers. His love of cooking was really one of the only reasons he still made breakfast and dinner for the Dursleys when ever he was home.

Once he was positive there were no clumps in the batter he moved over to the pans, the butter had melted and he made sure to spread it out evenly over the surface. With that done, Harry got out another bowl, cracked six eggs, added some salt and pepper, and whisked them enthusiastically. He always made something different for

himself, not really interested in the less healthy food that his relatives seemed to enjoy so much.

Once the butter had melted and started to brown Harry poured the eggs into the frying pan and stirred it with the flat side of a fork. When the sides started to set, he lifted the side and pulled it into the center, repeating this until half of the eggs were set. He spooned three tablespoons of double cream onto the eggs, then liberally sprinkled it with some Balderson's Cheddar cheese and put it under the grill. He popped two pieces of toast into the toaster and moved over to the other pan and flipped the pancake on it. The sound of the door to the kitchen/living room caused him to look up from the eggs and pancakes he had been cooking.

"Aunt Petunia," Harry greeted with a curt nod. His relationship with his aunt was probably the strangest of the bunch. Neither of them liked each other, Harry may not hate the woman like he used to when he was younger, but he greatly disliked her and knew that she despised, or at the least, very much disliked him. Of course, her feelings for Harry were so mixed in with other emotions that Harry could sense, but not make anything of that he was often left confused. However, Petunia was also something of his go-between for him and the other two Dursleys, who only spoke to him when absolutely necessary. Because of this, things remained somewhat cordial between them. Though Harry was sure part of the reason she was cordial was due to fear.

"Good, you're making breakfast," said Petunia in a stiff and formal voice. "Try not to burn anything; I want everything to be perfect for my Duddy's birthday."

That's right, Harry thought to himself. Today was Dudley's birthday, it was rather hard to forget about that, mainly because it was rather difficult to miss all of the presents that were practically hiding the table. It looked as though Dudley had gotten the new computer he wanted, not to mention a second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley wanted a racing bike was beyond Harry, as Dudley was very fat and hated exercise – unless of course it involved punching somebody. For the first six years of Harry's life, he had been Dudley's favorite punching bag.

"Yes, Aunt Petunia," Harry said in a humoring voice. They both knew there was nothing she could do if he decided to be rebellious.

Petunia sniffed, nodded, and headed back towards the stairs to get Dudley. Harry had nearly finished making breakfast by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel – Harry usually wondered how many branches his cousin hit when he fell from the fat and ugly tree.

Harry put the plates of pancakes, eggs and bacon on the table, which was difficult as there wasn't much room. He went back and grabbed his own food from under the grill, his toast, and sat down to eat. Dudley, meanwhile, was counting his presents. His face fell.

"Thirty-six," he said, looking at his mother and father. Harry was impressed that his cousin could count that far, he used to only be capable of counting the number of fingers on his hands. "That's two less than last year."

"Darling, you haven't counted Auntie Marge's present, see, it's here under this big one from Mommy and Daddy."

"All right, thirty-seven then," said Dudley, going red in the face. Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, moved over to the counter top to eat in case Dudley turned the table over.

Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger too, because she said quickly, "And we'll buy another two presents while we're out today. How's that, popkin? Two more presents. Is that alright?"

Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work for him. Finally he said slowly, "So I'll have thirty...thirty..."

"Thirty-nine, sweetums," said Aunt Petunia.

"Oh." Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. "All right then."

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

"Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like his father. 'Atta boy, Dudley!" He ruffled Dudley's hair.

There were a few moments of silence as everyone ate, and Dudley opened his presents. When they were finished, Harry took the plates away. As he grabbed Aunt Petunia's plate she fixed him with a look, "I do not want you here while we are at the zoo today."

Harry understood what she was really saying. Harry was never allowed in the house when no one was there; they did not trust him enough to leave him alone. "I plan on going to the dojo for a while, and then I'm going to head over to the library and meet up with Lisa," said Harry.

Petunia snorted, Vernon looked disgruntled, and Dudley looked constipated. When Harry was seven years old, he had found a small dojo that taught a variety of Chinese Martial Arts. It had taken various levels of violence threatened and a demonstration of Harry's magic by levitating several knives and floating them around the three Dursleys before he was allowed to go. Dudley had wanted to go as well, but ended up quitting because it was too much work. None of them liked the fact that he went there, but could do nothing about it as Harry paid for his time there himself.

"Very well," said Petunia, while Vernon muttered about how 'freaks' shouldn't be allowed to learn how to fight.

Just then, the doorbell rang – "Oh, good Lord, they're here!" said Aunt Petunia frantically – and a moment later, Dudley's best friend, Piers Polkiss, waked in with his mother. Piers was a scrawny boy with a face like a rat. He was usually the one who held people's arms behind their backs while Dudley hit them. Or at least he was, before Harry decided to intervene every time he saw them about to start their bullying, whether they still did that when he wasn't around was unknown.

Not more than a few minutes later, the Dursleys and Piers were gone and Harry was walking to the dojo. Along the way he offered a small wave to Mr. Fig, a woman who owned several dozen cats and had, on rare occasion babysat him when he was younger, as well as a few other people in the neighborhood. Because Harry paid for everything that was his, he had offered to mow the lawns of the residents of Private Drive for five pounds an hour. While quite a few people had not trusted him, in no small part due to Petunia's

gossiping about him being a horrible, demented child, Harry had found several people who had agreed to his offer, and pretty soon word had spread and he was mowing nearly the lawn of nearly everyone on the entire block. Petunia had been pretty burned up about that since most people had discounted her words because Harry always made sure to remain respectful. It had been a long time before the horse-necked woman had gained her credibility with the other gossiping women of Private Drive after that.

Half an hour later Harry reached a small, inconspicuous building that looked somewhat run down. The only reason anyone would have been able to recognize it as a martial arts dojo was the sign that showed two people in combat above the door.

Harry opened the door and entered.

The inside of the building was a simple looking room. At the front there was a small desk with an old, worn out cash register on top of it, there was a book case standing against the wall next to the desk forming a ninety degree angle, and was holding various books on combat, pressure points, acupuncture and medicinal plants. The area beyond the desk was covered by a large blue mat, on one side was a mirror that ran along the wall, on the other side were several stands that had swords, staffs, Kusari-gama's and even a scythe on them. At the end of the room was a hall with four doors.

"Ah, Harry, I was wondering if you would come in today," said a small, old Chinese man. Standing at a little shorter than Harry himself, Master Chang Wei did not strike an imposing figure, however, Harry did not let the man's size fool him. Despite being over seventy years old, Master Wei could beat Harry six ways to Sunday with one hand tied behind his back, hopping on one foot, while blindfolded. He had done it plenty of times in the past and could still do so now.

"Today is Dudley's birthday," said Harry, shrugging his shoulders. "I figured I would come here and see if you were up for a spar Master Wei."

When Harry had first found the dojo, he had been an enraged youth who was not only not afraid to threaten violence against his relatives, but had no compunctions on following through with his threats when his demands were not met. There had been several instances where



Harry would use his powers to throw his uncle or cousin through a wall in order to get his way. That was part of the reason neither Dudley nor Vernon talked to him, and why Petunia feared him.

It was Master Chang Wei who had seen this, took Harry in and taught him that rage and hatred would not help him in life. When Master Wei's point had finally sunken in, Harry had been horrified to realize that he had been treating his relatives exactly how he had been treating. The thought had disgusted him so much that he had done his best to change, and vowed to never become like them.

It had taken Harry nearly a year of meditation, contemplation, and getting pounded into the dirt while being told "Martial Arts is not just a way of fighting, but an art and an oath. An art that allows one to express themselves in movement, and an oath to never use combat and violence unless it is the only way to defend yourself and the innocent" by the old Chinese Martial Arts master before Harry had been able to move truly past most of his hatred of the Dursleys. He still didn't like them, and probably never would, but he wouldn't let himself be ruled by hatred. He was better than that.

"Same as every year, then," Said Master Wei. "Change into your uniform, and meet me on the mat."

"Hai," said Harry, bowing before he went into the locker room that one of the doors at the end of the hall led to. He came back bare foot and wearing a simple white gi with a blue belt, only three steps down from a black belt. Harry was not only a quick study, but worked very hard to earn his rank and was considered to be something of a prodigy. Of course, that was only by the standards of the other students, according to Master Wei, he was a clumsy fool with no coordination and lacked the finesse needed to master the fine art of combat. Than again, Master Wei said that to everyone he taught.

"You know the routine, Harry," said Master Wei as Harry stood before him, looking straight ahead as was proper.

"Hai," Harry dropped down on his feet and knuckles and began doing push-ups, counting in the basic chinese number system until he reached a figure that Master Wei was satisfied with.

"Up!" Commanded the old man, and Harry kicked his feet up so that he was performing a handstand.

"One hand!" Harry's breathing began to get heavy as he lifted his right hand so that he was standing on his left. When Wei commanded "Left!" he switched hands again.

"Bend!" said Master Wei. Harry let out a small grunt as his feet moved over his head, and where he feet were previously facing away from the wall, they were now planted firmly on the ground facing the mirror as he formed a bridge with his stomach pointed to the ceiling –

– only for Master Wei to kick his feet and knock him to the ground several seconds after the bridge had been formed, saying, "your form is not sturdy enough. Your form must always be like a wall, unmovable and strong. Were your form sturdy that little tap would not have been enough for you to fall."

"Hai, Master Wei," said Harry as he stood up, knowing better then to contest the small man. The last time he did Harry had gotten beat worse than usual.

"Now go through your forms," commanded Master Wei. "Katas forty-two through fifty."

"Hai!" Harry shifted smoothly into the beginning of the first stance he was ordered to perform. He continued through this, moving through the stances fluidly, speeding up when commanded, slowing down and even halting when in a particularly painful or uncomfortable stance and defending himself from attacks from Master Wei while trying not to break out of his movement. By the time he was finished Harry had worked up a light sweat.

"Forms forty-nine and fifty need work," said Master Wei. "Too loose in form forty-nine, and too stiff in form fifty. Work them again."

Harry did not hesitate to as asked, and began working those two forms until Chang Wei was satisfied. He was thankful that he only needed to get the form down once before he never forgot it. Otherwise Master Wei would have worked him much harder.

"Not bad, were I a drunken monkey with no coordination what-so-ever I dare say that would be impressive," commented Master Wei lightly.

It wasn't the compliment Harry was hoping for, but then again, Chang Wei never gave compliments lightly, or at all, really. Once his katas were finished, Harry began sparring with the old master; the dojo was closed for today so Harry did not have to worry about other students coming in. Chang knew of Harry's living arrangements and had offered him the ability to stay here when things were bad with his relatives. By the time Harry was finished getting kicked across the matt, he had worked up a heavy sweat and had some severe bruising along his torso. For an old man, Master Chang Wei hit hard.

"I believe we are done for the day, young one," said Master Wei. "Go wash up and head home."

Harry did as told, using the communal shower in the back to wash and got dressed in his street clothes, only instead of heading home, he went to the library. Even before Harry had found the dojo the library had been a sanctuary for him. The story's that were found in books allowed for an escape from the realities of his life, the hardships he had endured and the scars it had left on his psyche. Harry had always been a fast study, in school he had learned what was taught long before the other students. During recess he used to spend his time in the school library, reading anything and everything he could get his hands on. Before Harry had really started coming to in his martial arts, he had been very anti-social, often spending all his recess and lunch in the library reading. When he had exhausted all of the books in the school library, he had asked a teacher, and been given directions to the public library, which was not that far from Private Drive or his school.

The library was not the largest in the world, with Surrey only being a small city the library reflected that size. It was still big enough that Harry doubted he could read everything in it before he managed to leave the Dursley's for good.

Grabbing a book, one that held historic battles of the Roman Empire, Harry made his way to the back where several comfy couches were for reading purposes. When he reached the reading area, he saw that there was somebody already there. A petite, cute girl around his age with short brown hair, brown eyes, and a kind smile on her face.

The girl looked up when she heard his footsteps and a smile lit her face.

"Harry!" she squealed, drawing a glare and "Sh!" from the librarian, which she basically ignored as she latched onto Harry in a hug.

"Lisa," Harry greeted with a hug of his own. Lisa Crawft was probably Harry's only real friend.

He had met her a little over a year after he began his training in the Martial Arts, being bullied by his cousin and his gang. By then Harry had gained his reputation as someone who hated people who bullied others, and would actually do something about it. He had beaten up his cousins friends several dozen times before that day, and when Dudley and the others saw him they had run as if the hounds of hell were nipping at their heels.

After that Lisa had proclaimed him her hero, and much to his disgruntlement, not only awarded him with a kiss on the cheek (which he had wiped off immediately), had also taken to following him around at school and after school. It had taken nearly six months for him to warm up to the girl, and after that he would spend his time with her, rather than reading. He could even admit that she was half the reason that he no longer held so much anger inside of him and became more outgoing.

Once he had turned nine Harry became fairly popular at school; thanks to his dislike for bullying, protective nature and athletic ability many people liked him. However none of the other kids were people he really considered friends, more like people he hung out with at school but wouldn't spend time with them outside of it, and Harry was fine with that, he knew he was unlikely to see these people once he grew up and so never let himself get attached to them. Only Lisa had truly endeared herself to him.

"How are you today?" asked Lisa, pulling away from her hug and looking at Harry with those innocent doe-eyes that made it impossible for any being not to love her.

"Alright," Said Harry, trying to look anywhere but her eyes; that way would lead to him doing whatever she wanted while he was here, she would likely force him to read her favorite story and he really had no desire to read the girly fiction novels she loved so much. "It's

Dudley's birthday today, him and Piers went to the zoo so I decided to do some sparring and read a good book."

Lisa looked at him with a small, amused smile, "that's just like you. Never anything fun, all sparring and studying."

"That's not true, I do other things," Harry said with a frown as he sat down. "But with football season over I don't have a lot more things I can do outside of school and sparring is fun."

"How about spending time with your friends?" Lisa sat down next to him and looked at what he was reading. "How can you read something so boring?" she asked, wrinkling her nose in distaste. His friend hated reading anything remotely related to history or anything that could be considered learning when she was not at school.

Harry grinned as he grabbed her nose between his fore and middle fingers, shaking her head back and forth. "Don't make fun of history, a lot of our stories and movies come from historic moments in time."

Lisa pried his hand off and rubbed her nose before pouting at him. "Oh yeah! What about Star Wars?" she asked, crossing her arms over her chest. Star Wars had been the first movie Harry had ever seen, and had to admit it was one of his favorites.

It had also been the first time he had been over to Lisa's house, and had ended up falling asleep with Lisa stubbornly clinging to him like he was some kind of teddy bear. Her parents had thought it was so adorable that they had taken several pictures and then decided to place them on the wall of embarrassment, where they showed them to anyone who came in. He was very glad they rarely had other company over when he was around.

"Ok, so that's not historic," Harry admitted. "But what about Gladiator?"

"James bond."

"Hercules."

"Fantasia."

"Helen of Troy."

Lisa poked out her tongue, as she always did when she couldn't think of something else to say, and Harry grinned, knowing he had won. They settled down and Harry began to read about the fall of the Roman Empire. As day became dusk, Harry noticed Lisa was beginning to nod off.

"Lisa, Lisa," whispered Harry, gently shaking Lisa awake.

"Huh? Wha –" said Lisa, rubbing her eyes a bit. "Oh, Harry, I must have fallen asleep. It was probably that book you were reading, it was so boring."

"Ha ha, you're a funny girl," Harry mock laughed before standing up and stretching. He looked back at Lisa and tilted his head to the left as he asked, "are your parents picking you up?"

"No," Lisa shook her head. "I told them I was going to walk home today – tonight – what ever."

Harry chuckled a bit and nodded, "ok, I'll walk you home."

"Aww! Harry's gonna walk little ol' me home, how kind good sir," Lisa giggled.

"Far be it from me to allow thy fair maiden to walk home without protection," Harry said with an exaggerated Shakespearian accent, giving an exaggerated bow before offering his arm.

Lisa's home was on the way to Harry's place of residence (he refused to call it home), so he did not really mind walking her home. He did not admit, even to himself, but he was also protective of the kind girl who was like a younger sister to him, despite her actually being older than he was by a few months.

When they got to Lisa's house the door opened and a beautiful woman who looked like Lisa would when she grew up stood in the doorway. "Lisa, and Harry!" much like Lisa, but with more poise and less squeeze, Lisa's mom, Anastasia, gave him a large hug.

"Good evening , Mrs. Crawft," said Harry, returning the hug readily. While he was much more accepting of physical affection than when he was younger, he only allowed a few people to touch him in such

a fashion, and she was one of them. Lisa was the other. Master Wei's beatings didn't count.

Anastasia pulled back and gave him a light hearted glare, "how many times have I told you to call me Stacy?"

"Six hundred-seventy-six times, ma'am," Harry answered with a shrug.

Both Lisa and Stacy rolled their eyes at the typical answer.

"Are you gonna stay over for dinner?" she asked.

Harry shook his head, "not today ma'am. Since it's Dudley's birthday I'm going to be expected home."

Stacy frowned, she knew there was no love between Harry and his family. She could not understand how such a kind, respectful and upstanding boy could possibly be related to those people.

"Well do be sure to come by sometime this week ok? I'll even make your favorite dish."

Harry actually looked interested at that and, after a moment's pause, nodded and said, "I suppose I could make it this...Wednesday?"

"That's fine Harry, you know when we usually have dinner."

"Bye, Harry," said Lisa, giving Harry another hug. Harry returned the hug before making his way home.

By the time Harry got back home, it was dark.

"...Harry," said Petunia stiffly as he entered the house. "Dudley has just finished opening the last of his presents."

"I suppose I could clean it," said Harry slowly. These people were so lazy, couldn't they do anything by themselves?

Petunia nodded and walked away, her painful looking stiletto heels clicking against the floor. When he was sure she had gone Harry looked at the many torn wrappers in the kitchen and living room. He channeled a little bit of his magic and waved his hand at the mess.

In an instant, all of the trash disappeared, as if it were never there to begin with.

Satisfied Harry walked into his room, stripped himself to his boxers, and opened the book he had checked out from the library. After an hour of reading he marked his page, placed the book on the desk, did his nightly meditation and then lay down to go to sleep.

XoX

"Harry Potter."

"Here ma'am," said Harry, raising his hand as his name was called. He ignored the rest of the roll being called until the teacher, a woman with dark brown hair named Catherine Stalart, finished and began her lecture for the day.

"Today is going to be a review..." Harry listened to the lecture halfheartedly. He had already read everything she had to teach him in the library, and he had no questions on this particular English lesson.

He looked outside to see the heatwaves beginning to form in the distance. School was almost over and summer would be coming soon. Harry wasn't sure if he was glad for that or disappointed, since summer would mean that he would have to find more subjects to read and study on to keep busy.

As he waited for the bell ring that signaled recess, Lisa, who was sitting right next to him was writing on a sheet of paper. A second later she handed it to him when the teacher had her back turned.

Looking at the crumpled sheet in amusement, Harry unwrinkled it and read:

How was the rest of Big Dorks birthday party?

Harry snorted a bit to contain the small laugh that threatened to escape him. Ever since Harry had befriended her Lisa made fun of Dudley and his gang every chance she got, she had given a nickname for each one of them and it never failed to amuse him.



He wrote a few sentences and waited until the teacher was not looking to pass it over. When they had first started passing notes, Dudley had attempted tell and get them into trouble. However, Harry had used his magic to make the paper invisible before anyone else could notice it. Dudley had gotten in trouble instead of him for telling lies, and the Dursleys had been unable to do anything about it after Harry had floated all three of them in the air, and hung them upside down.

Once the bell rang for recess Harry and Lisa hooked up with a few of the people they knew and spent time with at school and went outside. While Lisa talked with the girls in the group, Harry spent his time playing with a Frisbee one of the boys brought from home.

While they were playing Harry spotted a familiar scene, one he had come across several times in the past. Dudley and his gang were picking on a student who looked to be a year or two younger than them. They hadn't gotten very physical yet; content to just push the kid back and forth for the moment, but Harry knew that could change at any moment.

Harry tossed the Frisbee to Chris, a kid with short cropped blond hair and blue eyes, then made his way over to Dudley's gang.

"Having fun Big D?" Harry asked in faux cheerfulness. The entire gang jumped and turned around to see him grinning at them. "Perhaps it would be more fun if I joined in and showed you how it feels to be on the opposite end of your bullying?" he suggested.

Almost as one the small group of degenerate bullies ran off, nearly tripping over their own feet in an effort to escape.

Harry sighed at their abject stupidity and held a hand out to the kid. "You alright?" asked Harry.

"Erm, yeah, thanks," the kid, a boy with curly brown hair, brown eyes and glasses said as Harry helped him up.

"No problem," Harry told him, waving off the thanks as if it what he had done was something anyone would do. "Why don't you join me and my friends?" he suggested, pointing to where the others were looking at them.

"Ok, thank you!"

"Alright, well, come on."

XoX

The days passed on and soon enough, school was over. Like always Harry had gotten top marks, and several recommendations from his teachers; and like always, Harry kept his progress reports from his relatives. They did not care what he got, and he did not care what they thought. By the time summer holidays had started Dudley had ended up breaking his new video camera, crashed his remote control airplane, and the first time out on his racing bike, knocked down old Mrs. Figg as she crossed Private Drive on her crutches.

Harry had never really liked summer, while he never really learned anything that he did not already know in class thanks to constantly reading ahead in school, it at least gave him something to do, even if it was busy-work, and because it was so hot there were no sports during the summer either.

He was only glad that Dudley's friends, Piers, Dennis, Malcolm, and Gordon, who were all as stupid as Dudley himself, no longer played Harry hunting. No longer because the few times Dudley got the courage to try it they had all got beaten up (It was after Harry had started Martial Arts), and Dudley's parents could do nothing about it, lest Harry use his magic send them through a wall.

Still it was not all bad, Harry spent much of his time at the dojo, sparring with many of the students. Being one of the best in class, Harry would often fight against students several years older than himself, which was a big ego booster for him. At least, until Master Wei brought it back down with another beating. Nothing deflated egos like getting your arse kicked by a seventy year old man, even if he was a master in fifteen different martial arts.

Other than spending time sparring, Harry also spent time at the library and with Lisa and her parents.

One day in July, Aunt Petunia took Dudley to London to buy his Smelting uniform. Dudley had been accepted to Uncle Vernon's old

private school, Smeltings. Piers Polkiss was going there too. Harry had spent that time at Lisa's house, watching movies, eating his favorite foods and ended up staying the night.

It was a good thing for Harry too, as that day Dudley had paraded around in his new uniform for his parents, not that it had spared him from that the next day. Smeltings' boys wore maroon tailcoats, orange knickerbockers, and flat straw hats called boaters. They also carried knobby sticks, used for hitting each other while teachers weren't looking. This was supposed to be good training for later life. Just what that training was for Harry didn't know and felt it was a stupid tradition that just stuck around due to the people who ran the school lacking brain cells.

The next morning after Harry had gotten up and made breakfast and after everyone had finished eating, they all heard the click of the mail slot and flop of letters on the doormat.

"Harry," petunia started, but Harry was already on the way towards the mail, knowing what she would ask.

Three things lay on the doormat: a postcard from Uncle Vernon's sister, Marge, who was vacationing on the Isle of Wight, a brown envelope that looked like a bill, and – a letter for Harry.

Harry's breath caught in his throat as he picked it up and looked it over. He knew what this was. He had been expecting, waiting, for it since he was seven and intelligent enough to understand what his memories meant. Even without checking it, he knew what it contained. After all, no one sent him mail. Master Chang didn't send him anything that he could not walk over and pick up himself, and Lisa and her family lived within walking distance. There was no other explanation as to what this could be, especially with the way it was addressed:

Mr. H. Potter

The Smallest Room on the Second Floor

#4 Private Drive

Little Whinging

Surrey

The envelope was thick and heavy, made from yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp.

Turning the envelope over in his hand, Harry saw a purple wax seal bearing a coat of arms; a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake surrounding a large letter H.

"Hurry up, boy!" shouted Uncle Vernon from the kitchen. It was the first time the large man had spoken to him in all of a year.

Harry went back into the kitchen, an odd smile on his face as he walked in. odd, because he almost never smiled around his relatives. He handed Uncle Vernon the bill and the postcard, then he turned to Aunt Petunia.

"It came," he said. It was all he needed to say. Petunia gasped and went pale, Vernon began to turn a puce color, and Dudley, as always, looked constipated.

"I-I-I see," Aunt Petunia finally managed to get out. Uncle Vernon just made choking noises.

Harry sat down, feeling jittery from the anticipation, taking a deep breath he opened the letter and read the contents:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore

(order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock,

Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)

Dear Mr. Potter,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

Terms begin on September 1. We await your owl by no later than July 31.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress

"We await your owl," Harry read again, out loud this time. He took a moment to make sure he had not missed anything, then looked up at Aunt Petunia and said, "You know where to go to get school supplies." It was not a question.

"Yes, I know that... place where my sister bought her school supplies is," Aunt Petunia sniffed. She had been forced to go with her parents and sister, Lily, when she went to get her Hogwarts supplies. She could still remember the day, the disgusting way her parents were so proud of her freak sister, and how happy Lily was. She never thought she would have to deal with that world again.

Funny how life works against us sometimes.

"Then you will give directions to the place I need to go to get my school supplies," said Harry. "In return, I will make breakfast, lunch and dinner for your family until it's time for me to go to Hogwarts at least... three times a week."

Petunia, who had opened her mouth to deny helping him getting any supplies for that freakish school, closed it upon hearing his offer. This was how things usually went now. Harry would offer a compromise in order to get what he wanted. He could of course, just threaten her, they both knew that, but Harry was better than that, was better than the Dursleys who likely would threaten him to get their way if he was still the helpless little boy he used to be. He would not resort to violence unless it was absolutely necessary.

"Very well," Petunia said at last. "Tomorrow we'll take you to...that place," she shuddered at the thought of going back there.

"NO!" Vernon roared as he suddenly stood up and glared at Harry. "You're not going to that school! The last thing we need is for even more freakishness from you! I won't let you go somewhere that you're going to learn that ridiculous wand-waving and freaky unnaturalness! I've put up with more than enough from you!"

"Vernon!" Petunia gasped, her face paling. She looked over at Harry whose eyes were beginning to glow a light green.

"I see," Harry said quietly. A second later Vernon was floating in the air, upside down, looking at Harry with fear in his eyes while the color drained from his face.

"I'm surprised you don't want me to go to this school Uncle Vernon," Harry continued in the same soft voice, he didn't do it very often anymore, but he knew how to use intimidation if required. "You do know that if I go to this school, I'll be out of your air for nearly a year." He paused to give his uncle time to think about that, though he might not be capable of it with all the blood that was likely rushing to his head.

"And if you don't let me go..." Harry trailed off and shrugged, leaving his threat hanging in the air.

"Alright, alright," Vernon struggled to speak with the blood rushing to his head he was beginning to feel dizzy. "I'll let you go to that bloody school. Now put me down!"

"We have an accord then," said Harry, putting his uncle down on walking towards his room.

He hopped on his bed and began day dreaming about all of the things he would learn when he finally went to Hogwarts.

XoX

So this is how it's going to go down. I will be updating this story differently than the others. I plan on updating by Books, so instead of one chapter, once a week, I will write out one books, and update with new chapters each day until all the chapters for that book are done. I have Book one, Harry Potter and the Memories of the Past, already written. I will update a chapter each day, until Book one is

finished. After that, updates for this story will likely be a while, until I get started on and finish the second book.

Now with that out of the way, enjoy this chapter.

## Chapter 2: A trip to Diagon Alley

XoX

The next day could not have come sooner for Harry who had in spite of not looking it, been far too hyped up and excited to go to sleep. Instead he had spent his time during what he had, in the privacy of his room, jokingly referred to as Force exercises, which was essentially meditation except that Harry would levitate objects and make them orbit around his room. He had at one time, tried levitating himself but that had been too tiring for him to maintain for more than a minute, even now, after five years of consciously using his magic, he could only go two at the most.

That morning after breakfast Vernon, with directions from Petunia, drove Harry into London. He had been there several times in the past, usually by calling a cab since his uncle did not like driving him. The place Harry was dropped off at was a tiny, grubby-looking pub. If Petunia had not given implicit directions, Vernon may have very well passed it, especially since he did not seem to know it was there (Harry had asked). The people hurrying by didn't even glance at it. Their eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the place (Petunia called it "the Leaky Cauldron") at all. In fact, Harry had the most peculiar feeling that he was the only one capable of seeing it. He refused to let this deter him and quickly entered the pub.

When he got inside the first thing Harry noted was it was very dark and shabby. A few old women were sitting in a corner, drinking tiny glasses of sherry. One of them was smoking a long pipe. A little man in a top hat was talking to the old bartender, who was quite bald and looked like a toothless walnut. Harry was, to be honest, a bit disappointed with how the place looked, it was like no one cared about their image, unless they were going for the dirty, piss-poor image. No one seemed to have noticed him yet, and in the low lighting it was hard for anyone to make out anyone else's features, he must have seemed like everybody else, minus the fact that he was not wearing robes.

Harry remembered from his conversation (interrogation) with Aunt Petunia that they actually had a witch escort them into and through the alley when his mom had gotten her letter, and that to gain



entrance required a wand. That meant he had to get some help to enter.

He went up to the bartender and vied for his attention, "excuse me sir?"

The bartender took one look at him, then his eyes promptly widened until Harry was positive that they would simply roll out of the bald man's socket.

"Good Lord," said the bartender, "is this – can it be -?"

The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.

"Bless my soul," whispered the old bartender, "Harry Potter...what an honor."

Before Harry could even think to question about just how this man knew his name, the old man hurried out from behind his bar, rushed toward Harry and seized his hand, tears in his eyes.

"Welcome back, Mr. Potter, Welcome back."

"Uh..." Harry had absolutely no idea what to say. Somehow this man knew him, and the way he was literally balling out the eyes and mumbling platitudes of how pleased he was to see Harry was very creepy, to say the least. Everyone in the entire room was looking at him. The old woman with the pipe was puffing on it without realizing it had gone out.

Then there was a great scraping of chairs and the next moment, Harry found people surrounding him on all sides, attempting to shake his hand, or even just to touch him.

"Doris Crockford, Mr. Potter, can't believe I'm meeting you at last."

"So proud, Mr. Potter, I'm just so proud."

"Always wanted to shake your hand – I'm all a flutter."

Harry could not even get a word in edge wise, and had no clue what to do. A part of him was almost tempted to go all kung fu on them and begin throwing people off. However that was a small part

compared to the panic he was beginning to feel. Harry had never done well in large crowds. It wasn't that he couldn't deal with them, he had been surrounded by a large number of people whenever his team won a football game. But that was predictable, he knew it was coming, and could prepare for it. It was nothing like just being mobbed by random people he had never met.

The people around him didn't even seem to notice his discomfort, or that he was starting to shake with the beginnings of a panic attack. They did not see how his breathing was starting to get labored, or how black spots were starting to form on the edge of his vision. Due to him being the sole attention of damn near everyone in the room, they did not see or hear the tables, the chairs and all the glasses and table wear in the room begin to jitter and shake. Fortunately for Harry and the people currently harassing him, someone did.

XoX

Minerva McGonagall had come to the Leaky Cauldron early that morning, a list of prospective students she would meet in her hand. Every year she would come here, have breakfast, and then walk around the Alley, just to make sure it had not changed overly much during the year she spent at Hogwarts when she could not make her way to the Alley, that way she could show the first year muggle-borns around without getting lost and making a fool of herself.

This year was no different, she had been having a morning coffee (Horrible stuff, but she was getting up there in her years and needed the energy caffeine provided) and was looking over the list of students she would visit today. The next student on her list was Hermione Jean Granger, an only child, parents were dentists (why Muggles actually needed someone else to clean their teeth she would never know), and she seemed to be something of a bookworm. After that she would go visit –

"Good Lord, is this – can it be -?"

When the words were spoken she, like everyone else turned to see what had grabbed old Tom's attention, and had nearly had a stroke at the sight of what could have passed for a young James Potter's clone. The only reason she knew it to be otherwise were the eyes, a brilliantly green that reminded her of the woman her favorite student had married.

She was then subject to watching the poor lad get swarmed. She had held back, not wanting to get tangled up in the crowd of trampling people. Because of this she had been the only person to spot all of the tables, chairs, and glass wear shaking, as well as the mounting panic on Harry's face.

McGonagall pushed through the crowd, using her imposing and imperious glare to make it through the sea of people. Seizing Harry by the arm she began pushing her way out of the crowd. She did not speak, she did not need to speak. Anyone who had ever been on the receiving end of her glare (and that was just about everyone in the Leaky Cauldron) was deathly afraid of it. When they made it through the crowd, out the back, and into a small courtyard, Harry Potter dropped to his knees, gasping for breath and holding his arms to himself as he tried to control his erratic shaking.

"Mr. Potter, are you alright?" asked Minerva, admittedly worried. While she had not been sure what to expect when she first met Harry, or re-met as it were, she had not expected it to be seeing the boy freaking out over being surrounded by well-wishers.

"I-I'll be f-fine," Harry got out, his teeth were grit and his eyes were closed as he attempted to settle down. He fell back onto his bottom and pushed himself in a cross legged position. It took a while; a lot longer then he liked to bring his hay-wire emotions and bodily shaking under control. When he finally felt his breathing even out and his shaking stop, he looked up at the severe looking woman, "thank you for helping me, ma'am. I'm not normally like this, but I was so surprised that I couldn't control myself."

McGonagall, though still surprised by the events inside accepted his thanks with a nod and said, "you are welcome, Mr. Potter. Though I must ask what you are doing here without your relatives and the teacher assigned to escort you to Diagon Alley?" It was always tradition for one of the Head of House teachers to meet with any of the Muggle-born, or in Harry's case, Muggle raised students so they can understand the basics of what life at Hogwarts and in the wizarding world would be like.

Rather than answer McGonagall's question, Harry frowned, "I'm sorry ma'am, but how do you know about my relatives? For that

matter how do you, and everyone else seem to know who I am? And what do you mean by Teacher assigned to escort me?"

Oh dear.

"Mr. Potter, do you mean to tell me you have no clue as to why you are famous?" asked Minerva, her lips drawn into a slightly thin line.

"Er, not really," said Harry, standing up now that he was feeling better. "You said I'm famous? How am I famous?" he was tempted to ask if his fame had anything to do with Voldemort but stilled his tongue, it was never wise to give out such information freely, and would invite unwanted questions about how he had that kind of knowledge.

Oh yes, this was not good. Minerva took a long moment to curse Dumbledore's decision to drop Harry off at the Dursleys all those years ago. The man may be an amazing wizard, and may be powerful, intelligent and wise beyond all years. But he had a notorious lack of fore sight when it came to smaller details. He tended to see only the larger picture, rather than the details in said picture.

"Why don't we go back inside and sit down, I will endeavor to explain to you what I can," said Minerva. It would make her a tad late to her appointments, but someone needed to ensure Harry knew what he was getting into. She began walking but soon stopped when she noticed Harry was not following her. Looking back she saw him standing there, staring at the place they had just come from wearily.

"No one will bother us anymore, I assure you," Minerva told him reassuringly. After a moment or two Harry followed her back inside. Everyone looked over at them as they came in, several even started to move, but one glare from McGonagall and they were convinced they had better things to do than bother a celebrity. They chose a booth near the back, right next to the exit in case Harry needed a quick escape.

Sitting there she chose to study Harry for a moment. Now that he seemed to be in control of himself Minerva could see he had filled out well. He was wearing black pants, a sleeveless green shirt and black jacket combination, and she could see that unlike most

wizarding boys his age, or wizards in general, he was fairly well muscled. No longer panicked, his eyes held a firm confidence they had been lacking when he had been beset by his fans. To her surprise, and in all honesty, sadness, his eyes looked a lot older than that of an eleven year old boy. Whatever his childhood had been like, he had obviously been forced to grow faster than he should have. She was not quite sure what to make of that, but decided to reserve judgment until she saw more of his character.

"I suppose I should start by introducing myself," said McGonagall after a moment's silence. "My name is Minerva McGonagall."

"You're the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts," said Harry, suddenly his eyes were alight with interest.

"Yes I am," McGonagall blinked. "Am I to believe you received your letter then?"

"Of course," said Harry, reaching into his jacket pocket and pulling out his Hogwarts letter. "I have it right here."

Minerva frowned as she was handed his letter, "and why are you not with the teacher who gave this to you?"

Harry blinked and tilted his head from side to side as a look of slight confusion crossed his face, "I didn't get this from a teacher. It was dropped in the mail yesterday."

"Albus... how foolish can you get," Minerva muttered under her breath, though Harry only caught a bit of it. Sighing she said, "Mr. Potter, normally when we have a student who is Muggle-born, or Muggle raised as you are, we have one of our Teachers meet with you and take you to Diagon Alley ourselves. That way, we can help you adjust to your life in the wizarding world."

"Oh," said Harry in a small voice. He shrugged. "Well, I didn't get a teacher and – wait – what's a Muggle?"

Oh bother.

"A Muggle is what we magical folk call non-magical humans," explained McGonagall. "Your aunt, uncle and cousin are all Muggles."

"I see," said Harry, "ok that makes sense. Now, what's this about me being famous?"

How best to explain this Minerva wondered. "Why don't we start with what you already know," she said.

That seemed to be the best option; Harry did not need to be given the same information he already had. He took his time to explain about the letter that had come with him when he was dropped on the Dursley's doorstep, the protection and what he knew about his parents and the night they died. When he was finished, Minerva leaned back in her seat, a thoughtful look on her face. He left out that he knew exactly what happened that night, when Voldemort had killed his family.

"You at least know the basics so I do not need to tell you that," she said at last. "The reason you are famous, Mr. Potter, is that the night your parents were..."

"Killed?" asked Harry when Professor McGonagall had trailed off, "it's ok, you can say it Professor."

"Right, well, yes, the night your parents were murdered He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named tried to kill you too and —"

"He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?" asked Harry. "You mean Voldemort?"

McGonagall flinched at the name but also looked startled. "How do you know his name, Mr. Potter? If you do not know of Hogwarts, or the wizarding world, then knowing about him should not be possible either."

Harry cursed his slip-up and debated on what to tell her, how much should he trust her. In the end, he decided to reveal how much he knew without revealing how he knew it.

"My Aunt knows a little about the wizarding world," Harry said carefully. "She told me a little bit, and I read the letter that was left with me when I was placed on the Dursley's doorstep."

When Harry was left on the Dursleys doorstep Aunt Petunia was given a letter by Albus Dumbledore explaining what had happened.

His parents had been killed by a dark wizard, and he had been sent to the Dursleys. The reason for this was because of his mother's sacrifice, which had given him protection against some kind of curse that should have killed him. It was this same protection that had allowed Dumbledore to create a powerful set of wards (Which Albus called protection in the letter), one that would refuse anyone with ill intent from entering so long as Harry still called Privet Drive home.

When he had found out about that he had been tempted to state that the Dursleys residence was in fact, not home. However, after further thought he realized he did not have much choice. With no way to get in contact with the magical world other than Petunia, and no place to live he had been forced to admit that, for now at least, he needed to live with the Dursleys. He would wait until he was older and more knowledgeable, and then he would try and find some place he could live away from the Dursleys.

"What I want to know is how everyone else knows what happened?" asked Harry.

"Albus Dumbledore, who had found you within the ruins of your parents' house, had informed the Wizengamot..." she trailed off when she noticed the blank look Harry was giving her. "That's the legislative body of wizarding Britain," she explained before continuing, "about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-named," McGonagall stated.

"And I guess they required him to go into details about Voldemort's demise?" asked Harry, frowning a bit when he saw the Professor flinch. Was Voldemort that scary? Yeah, he was ugly and frightening, but no one warranted the kind of fear she was showing.

"That is it exactly."

"I see," said Harry. Several seconds later he asked, "and I suppose I can expect to have the same reception I got here anywhere else I go, yes?" At her nod Harry reached into his jacket and pulled out a small, long, red cloth, which he proceeded to tie around his head, effectively covering the scar. "Problem solved, I hope."

Standing up Harry bowed to Professor McGonagall and said, "thank you for informing me why I was mobbed earlier. If possible, could you get me into Diagon Alley?"

"Perhaps, it would be best if you waited a day or so, while I owl Professor Dumbledore to have a teacher escort you."

"No need," said Harry dismissively. "I have relied on myself for several years now, I don't need help beyond getting into the alley itself."

Minerva stared at the boy for several long seconds as she let his words sink in. Yes, she would be having a very long talk with Albus when she got back to Hogwarts. She looked back at the boy, contemplating whether or not she should help him.

"...Very well," McGonagal sighed, she had several appointments that she would be late to already and could not afford to delay, even if it was to help someone like Harry Potter. At the same time, he was already here so she might as well let him in, and he seemed capable enough to look after himself.

Standing up and leading Harry back into the courtyard. She tapped on the wall three times in a specific pattern, Harry looked at the patten she tapped, easily memorizing it so he could get in next time without help. He watched in wonder as the bricks quivered and a hole appeared which grew wider and wider, a second later they were facing an archway onto a cobbled street that twisted and turned out of sight.

"Will you need any help, Mr. Potter?" she asked again. A part of her wanted to escort the young boy through Diagon Alley herself and if it weren't for her being late to her appointments already she would. But even though she couldn't there were other teachers who could, "I have no trouble contacting Hogwarts and asking them to send someone over to help you."

Harry shook his head, "no thanks, maybe you could just point me to the first place I should go. I can find my way from there."

"Very well," McGonagall paused, "there will be a large, white building that you won't be able to miss. That is Gringotts, a wizarding bank controlled by the goblins. Your parent's vaults are there."



"Thank you ma'am," Harry gave her a small bow, even as he wondered about his parents vaults. Walking through the entrance, stopped and looked back towards the entrance, which had sealed itself off. He turned back around and found himself speechless.

The sun shone brightly on a stack of cauldrons outside the nearest shop.

Cauldrons - All Sizes - Copper, Brass, Pewter, Silver - Self-Stirring - Collapsible, said a sign hanging over them.

He wished he had about eight more eyes. There weren't many people milling about which wasn't strange, considering the early hour. There was an apothecary which was next to the cauldron shop which he supposed were for ingredients and potions itself. A low, soft hooting came from a dark shop with a sign saying 'Eyelops Owl Emporium — Tawny, Screech, Barn, Brown, and Snowy'. Next to it was a window with broomsticks on display. There were so many shops, he didn't even know if he could discover all there was to know about the place before he reached Hogwarts! There were shops selling robes, telescopes together with silver instruments Harry had never seen before, windows stacked with barrels of bat spleens and eels' eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills and rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of the moon...

And there in front of him, was the most imposing building in the Alley. It was very large and towering over the little shops with snow white, polished walls and burnished bronze doors. Next to the door was a small but fierce looking creature that Harry had never seen before. The goblin was about a head shorter than Harry. He had a swarthy, clever face, a pointed beard and, Harry noticed, very long fingers and feet. It wasn't until the creature snarled that he realized he was staring.

"I'm sorry," Harry apologized, bowing and startling the creature, which he was sure was a Goblin. "I am Muggle raised and I've never seen a Goblin before, I did not mean to be rude."

The Goblin he had been staring at opened and closed its mouth several times as if unsure what to say. Finally, it croaked out, "you are forgiven young wizard."

"Thank you," said Harry before making his way into the entrance hall. He was then faced with a second pair of doors, silver this time, with words engraved upon them:

Enter, stranger, but take heed

Of what awaits the sin of greed,

For those who take, but do not earn,

Must pay most dearly in their turn.

So if you seek beneath our floors

A treasure that was never yours,

Thief, you have been warned, beware

Of finding more than treasure there.

A pair of goblins bowed him through the silver doors and they moved into a vast marble hall. Harry looked around the bank, taking in the amazing sight of a goblin-run bank. It wasn't very busy since it was early but there were still about a hundred goblins sitting on high stools behind a long counter, scribbling in large ledgers, weighing coins in brass scales, examining precious stones through eyeglasses. There were too many doors to count leading off the hall, and yet more goblins were showing people in and out of these. Harry made his way to a counter.

"Good morning," said Harry, he wasn't sure exactly what to say and just decided to go with what McGonagall had told him. "I was told that my parents might have a vault here."

The Goblin looked at him with a sneer, "Do you have a key?"

Key? Wondered Harry even as he said, "no sir."

"Name?"

"Harry Potter."

That seemed to kick start the Goblin who looked at his forehead, only to see the bandana over it. "Very well, you will need to speak with your account manager and verify that you are indeed Harry Potter," the Goblin spoke in a harsh, guttural language that Harry figured was his native tongue, and he was ordered to follow another Goblin, who led him through one of the doors in the back of the hall and along a wide corridor with doors on both sides, and names engraved in the wood of the doors. They were shown entry to a door with strange symbols upon it and after knocking there was a bark of "Enter" from inside.

The office was large and various weapons lined the walls on one side, from plain daggers to gem-encrusted swords. The other wall was lined with two cabinets, one with files and another with several items that Harry didn't recognize. A fierce looking goblin with an annoyed expression sat behind the office desk, though he was a bit taller than the one who he had first spoke to, and his face was buried in files and reports.

"Excuse me, Master Goblin," that was the only title Harry could think of right now. "My name's Harry Potter and I am here to make an inquiry about my parents vaults and, if possible, take out some money for my school supplies."

The Goblin looked at him with a very pointed gaze and despite himself, Harry felt exposed. He did not let that show however, making sure to exude nothing more than an aura of confidence he did not truly feel. After several seconds, though to Harry it felt like hours, of this stare down, did the Goblin stand up and walk towards a cabinet where he got a piece of ancient looking parchment and a gem encrusted dagger. He placed the parchment and dagger before Harry and motioned with his hand towards the dagger as he finally spoke up.

"To prove you are who you say you are, place three drops of blood with the dagger onto the parchment. Your name will appear plus any vaults you are eligible to control."

Harry picked up the dagger and looked at it curiously.

"Ritual Dagger," said the Goblin, noting the youths gaze. "Once you make a cut and provide three drops of blood, your wound will heal."

"Ah," Harry slit a small cut on his finger and squeezed three drops onto the parchment.

The three drops hit the paper and were absorbed into it, disappearing. Likewise, Harry noted the cut on his finger was gone too. For a moment Harry thought he had done something wrong when nothing showed up, or maybe his parents did not have any vaults. Then, words started to write themselves on the parchment, as if someone invisible was writing them in very elegant hand writing. Moving in for a closer look, Harry saw the names and lists of all the vaults he owned, plus some extra information:

Harry James Potter – born July 31st 1980

Eligible for vaults:

Potter family vault (available once he reaches the age of majority):

5,489,234 galleons, 11 sickles, 1 knut

Various heirlooms; books, wands, jewelry, weapons

Total liquid value: 8,000,762 galleons 4 sickles, 7 knuts

Evans vault:

76,231 galleons, 9 sickles, 16 knuts

Various items collected from the house in Godric's Hollow

Total liquid value: 80,000 galleons, 6 sickles, 9 knuts

Potter trust vault:

50,000 galleons (to be reset at this amount yearly from the family vault starting at the age of 11)

Gryffindor family vault (available once he reaches the age of majority):

24,321,456 galleons, 16 sickles, 21 knuts

Unknown heirlooms

Total liquid capital: unknown

Eligible for inheritance of deeds:

Potter Manor – Godric's Hollow - Destroyed

Potter Ancestral Home – Manchester

Potter Flat – London

Potter Vacation Home - Sicily

Eligible for inheritance of stocks:

25% Nimbus racing broom company

5% The Daily Prophet Newspaper

20% Hogsmeade

10% Comets Racing

Harry stared at the vaults he had access to. To be more specific he stared at the ridiculous amount of money he had in each of his vaults. Vaults, as in plural, more than one. He had four vaults, including his trust vault, and combined two of those held over thirty million galleons. Now he didn't know what a galleon was, but a million of anything was a lot, and what he had was ridiculous.

"What's the conversation rate of galleons to pounds?" breathed Harry softly, as if afraid asking too loudly would result in the information on his vaults to disappear.

"One galleon is four pounds ninety-seven pence, one sickle is twenty-nine pence, and one knut is one pence."

Harry ran a quick conversation rate in his head. The Potter family vault had £27,336,388.16, , his mother's vault had £379,663.5, the Gryffindor vault had a whopping £27,965,051.65 and his trust vault always had a set amount of £248,999.99. If these calculations were true, then he was easily one of, if not the richest person in the world.

"Holy shit."

The Goblin watched with what could almost be considered amusement as various flashes of emotion crossed Harry's face, going from surprise, to contemplation, to shock, disbelief and finally...nothing, just a blank slate.

"I didn't know that much money existed..."

Perhaps it would be wise if he snapped the young man out of his fugue.

"Is there anything else you require Lord Potter?" asked the Goblin.

"Lord?" Harry looked up from his daze. He was a lord?

"Yes," answered the Goblin. "You are the heir apparent for the Noble and Most Ancient House of Potter, as well as a descendant of two deceased Houses." When he noticed the blank look he was receiving the Goblin asked, "I take it you don't know anything about your heritage?" A shake of the head. "Then I would suggest you get some books on the Noble Houses and pureblood society. Back to the matter at hand, the only vaults you are currently allowed to access are your trust vault, and Lily Evans vault."

"Why just those two?" asked Harry.

"The other vaults are House vaults; as such you cannot access them until you become the head of your house. And only when you reach the age of Majority, which is seventeen, the age when you become considered an adult in the magical world, can you become the head of your house unless you were emancipated early in your parents will."

Hearing that his parents might have a will caused Harry to perk up, "do my parents have a will?"

"They do, however it is in lockdown," answered the Goblin.

That brought a frown to Harry's face, "why?"

"Because you're magical guardian, a man named Sirius Black, is currently in jail. That means you are a ward of the Ministry, however

the wills are magically sealed so that only your legal magical guardian can open them."

Sirius, he remembered Sirius Black. The man who was always smiling and joking around when he visited Harry and his parents before they went into hiding. His dad had called him Padfoot. Why was he in jail? He shook his head, he would find out the reason on his own, right now he had other things to worry about and could not afford to have anything else on his plate. He would look into Sirius Blacks incarceration when he had time.

"I see," said Harry. "So the only vaults I can access are my trust vault, and my mother's vault."

"Yes," said the Goblin.

"Then I would like to visit them," said Harry. "My mother's first, then my trust vault."

"Very well," the Goblin spoke in the same harsh language Harry had heard before. Another Goblin came in and the one at the desk gesture to him, "this is Griphook, he will take you to your vaults." He then reached into his desk and pulled out two golden keys and handed them to Harry.

"These are your vault keys, just give them to Griphook when you get to your vault."

"Thank you," said Harry. "I didn't get your name, Master Goblin."

The goblin looked a little surprised, but answered anyways, "My name is Sharktooth."

Harry bowed, "thank you for your time Goblin Master Sharktooth." Standing up Harry followed Griphook who led him back to through the marble hall and towards another door. The Goblin held the door open for him. He saw that he had ended up in a narrow stone passageway lit with flaming torches. It sloped downward and there were little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled and a small cart came hurtling up the tracks toward them. They climbed in and were off.

At first they just hurtled through a maze of twisting passages. Harry's eyes moved as he watched the walls zoom past. The rattling car seemed to know its own way, because Griphook wasn't steering it.

Despite his eyes watering from the cold air rushing past, he kept them open. Once, he managed to catch a glimpse of a burst of fire and twisted to see if it was a dragon, however they were moving far too fast for even his reflexes to see as they were plunged deeper into the tunnel, passing an underground lake where huge stalactites grew from the ceiling and floor.

When the cart stopped Harry was actually somewhat disappointed, he had gone to a few amusement parks with Lisa, and this cart ride reminded him of one. Oh well, he still had the ride back up.

Harry got out and handed Griphook the key to his mother's vault. A lot of green smoke came billowing out as the door unlocked. When it cleared Harry stepped it and gasped. The vault was circular, one half seemed dedicated to money as there were mounds of gold coins. Columns of silver. Heaps of little bronze knuts.

The other half had several plastic Muggle containers. What they contained was anyone's guess.

"The gold ones are galleons," the Goblin said. "Seventeen silver sickles to a galleon and twenty nine knuts to a sickle."

"Thanks," said Harry. He walked over to the containers, not sure what to look for as he really only wanted something to remember his parents by. As he was searching the area, a small box caught his eye. This one was a lot smaller than the others, made of wood, not plastic, and had several gems encrusted on it. Harry did not know what it contained, but seeing as it was the only thing he could really carry without magic, he took it.

"I would like to visit my trust vault now," said Harry quietly.

"Very well," said Griphook.

They seemed to double back the way they came, though Harry was sure there was a different turn here or there. After less than a minute the ride had ended and they were there.



The trust vault, much like his mother's, had the same mounds, columns and heaps of coin. Unlike Lily's vault, this one only held coin and nothing else.

Before Harry decided on how much money he needed, he turned to Griphook and asked, "Is there an easier way to access the money from my trust vault without having to enter the vault every time I visit?"

"Gringott's provides money pouches that don't get heavy and can carry up to five hundred galleons for a five galleon fee."

"I was thinking something more along the lines of a Muggle check or credit card," said Harry. "Something that will allow me to pull money directly from my vault without needing to visit. I don't know how much money I need, and do not wish to have extra that I may lose or get stolen from me."

Griphook did not know what a muggle credit card was, but answered based on the information Harry gave. "We do have another pouch, one that ties itself directly into your vault. However those are much more expensive and have a transaction fee."

"How much?"

Griphook gave him a fanged grin, "one hundred galleons and a fifteen percent transaction fee."

Harry narrowed his eyes slightly, he got the feeling that Griphook was baiting him. Based on the few observations he had made since coming to Gringott's, he had been getting the feeling that the Goblins were a very greedy race, a race of merchants, as it were. Haggling for prices on services they provided seemed to right up there alley.

"That's an outlandish fee, I wouldn't dare go above ten galleons and a two percent transaction fee." Credit card lines in the Muggle world usually ran for five to six percent, so he would do his best to get it there.

Griphook gaped at the young wizard who was actually challenging the Goblin fees. None of the other wizards had dared to do that, it had in part, been the reason they had been able to rip off all of those

purebloods when they asked for the same service. At the same time it made for a rather boring transaction.

"Were I to go that low Gringott's would end up bankrupting their employers. ninety galleons and ten percent transaction fee."

The two of them went back and forth haggling the price. Eventually they settled on a thirty galleon deposit and a six percent transaction fee. In return for the galleons to buy the pouch, it was spelled with a notice-me-not charm and a recognition ward so that only Harry could use it. Because he had the pouch Harry only needed some money that he would convert into pounds, he ended up taking four hundred galleons to convert. With nothing left to accomplish at Gringott's for the moment, Harry took the cart back up to marble hall.

One wild cart ride and a conversion of money later and Harry was standing outside of Gringott's blinking into the sunlight. He looked around the Alley and tried to decide on where to go first. He took out the list that had come with his letter and read:

## HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

### Uniform

First-year students will require:

Three sets of plain work robes (black)

One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear

3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)

One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)

Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry name tags

### Course books

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1) By Miranda Goshawk

A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginners Guide to Transfiguration By Emeric Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi By Phyllida Spore

Magical Drafts and Potions By Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them By Newt Scamander

The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection By Quentin Trimble

Other equipment

1 wand

1 cauldron

1 set of glass or crystal phials

1 telescope

1 set brass scales

Students may bring an owl OR cat OR a toad

**PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS**

Harry looked at the closest store to see Madame Malkins, he thought about going there before he realized he would need some way to carry all of the equipment and clothing he was going to buy. With that thought in mind Harry went over to a shop that specialized in selling trunks. The moment he stepped inside the raven haired boy looked around, he saw that they had standard trunks but he wanted something that would give him more space and security. There were also multi-compartment trunks, some of those actually held the same amount of space as a flat, which in his opinion was totally ridiculous. Why would you need the same amount of space as an apartment?

"Excuse me sir," said Harry, getting the attention of the shop clerk.

"Yes?" the clerk, an old man with a pepper beard turned and looked at him. "Can I help you young man?"

"I was wondering if you create custom trunks?"

The shop clerk looked at Harry in interest, "we can, what are you looking for?"

"That would depend on what you offer," said Harry.

"We have many different offers for our trunks made from various leathers and dragon hides of your choice. You can have a number of compartments in your trunk, anywhere from one to eight compartments, and they can be charmed to expand their space large enough that you can fit a small room in them. They can also be designed for a specific function like a wardrobe space."

Harry nodded as he began planning out a trunk he wanted, "what about security?"

"We offer a wide selection of security charms, wards and locks. We have notice-me-not charms, feather light and shrinking charms, locking wards, wards that are tied into your blood and combination locks."

"I want a four compartment trunk made of Ukrainian Ironbelly, one designed for clothing, one for books, one for potions ingredients, another for rare and useful items. I want a shrinking charm placed on it, a combination lock and blood locking wards." That should allow him to properly sort all of his supplies and keep them safe, "and make the first compartment about four by five by four feet, the second ten by fifteen by eight feet, the third the same as the second and the fourth three by two by four feet."

"You are in luck, we have a trunk that has four compartments," said the shop clerk. "All I need to do is charm it and place the blood locking ward on it." Harry stayed and offered three drops of blood to link himself to the wards, and ended up paying three hundred galleons for the trunk.

With trunk in tow Harry made his way to Madame Malkin's to get his uniform. Madame Malkin was a squat, smiling witch dressed all in mauve.

"Hogwarts, dear?" she said, when Harry started to speak. "I'll be with you in just a minute; I've got a few customers before you."

Harry had to wait a few seconds while Madame Malkin went to the back. When she returned Harry asked, "what sort of materials do you use for your robes?"

"We only have a few," Madame Malkin said. "We have cotton, wool, and acromantula silk."

"What is acromantula silk?" asked Harry.

"Acromantulas are spiders that can grow up to several dozen feet large, their webs are harvested to create a very comfortable, magic resistant material we use in our robes. It's also the most comfortable of the fabrics we offer," Madame Malkin looked at Harry when he got a look on his face, "I take it that is what you want your robes to be made of dear?"

"Yes," said Harry with a nod.

Madame Malkin led Harry to the back and made him stand on a stool next to a cute, petite brunette with brown eyes and a bright smile. She had a second witch pinning her black robes. Harry had a long robe slipped over his head, and Madame Malkin pinned it to the right length.

"Hogwarts?"

Harry turned to look at the brunette before nodding, "yes, I take it your going as well?"

The brunette smiled, "yep! I just got my letter a few days ago. I can't wait to finally begin learning magic."

Harry chuckled a bit at the girl's enthusiasm. "I know what you mean," he said, "I'm having a hard time waiting myself."

"Are you muggle-born?" asked the girl.

"No," Harry shook his head, "but I am – what was it called? Muggle-raised."

"Oh, that's pretty rare," said the girl, tilting her head to the side. He noticed the smile on her face hadn't left and absently wondered if she was always smiling. She opened her mouth again and asked, "what house do you think you'll be in?"

"I'm not sure," said Harry, resisting the temptation to shrug his shoulders for fear that it would ruin the concentration of the woman who was taking his measurements. "I only know of one of the houses." He didn't mention that he was related to the founder of said house, he suspected that such a thing was rare and he did not know if that information could be used against him or not.

"There are four houses at Hogwarts, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin," the girl said.

"And which house do you think you'll be in?" asked Harry with a hint of curiosity lacing his tone.

"Ravenclaw or Slytherin," said the girl. "My father was in Slytherin but my mom was in Ravenclaw, so I suspect it will be one of those two." She tapped her chin and gained a thoughtful look, "of course, no one actually knows what house they'll be sorted into until their actually sorted. For all I know I could end up in Gryffindor."

She began talking about the houses and about the classes offered, Harry didn't even need to ask her any questions as she continued speaking. The girl appeared to be pretty friendly, or at the very least extremely talkative. Though Harry had to admit her enthusiasm was amusing.

"That's you done, my dear," Madame Malkin interrupted the girls talking, "I'll have your clothes ready for you in an hour or so." Harry nodded and stepped off the school, "we also offer charms for comfort, cleaning and sizing dear."

Harry nodded and told her to give his clothes all of the charms, offered a "thank you" to Madame Malkin, paid for his clothes and left.

"I'll see you at Hogwarts," said Harry, nodding a good bye the brunette girl.

"See you!" the girl shouted, waving her hand, much to the woman who was taking her measurements displeasure.

At his next stop Harry decided he wanted to get his owl. He found himself at Eeylops Owl Emporium, a dark store with soft hooting, rustling and the flickers of jewel-bright eyes inside. Harry walked around the store and found Tawny, Screech, Barn, Brown and Snowy owls inside. He walked around and looked at each one, however none of them felt right to him, as if they just weren't what he was looking for. He was about to leave when he spotted an owl in the back, a snowy owl with intelligent looking amber eyes.

"You won't be wanting this one," said the clerk as Harry looked up from his staring contest with the owl. The man nodded at the owl, "gone through eight customers she has. She's a picky bird."

Harry nodded, not really listening anymore as he stuck his hand in through the bars. The owl looked from him to the hand, then back to him, before giving it a small nip. He nodded to himself once more before opening the cage, ignoring the clerks squawking protest. The snowy owl flew from her cage with a flap and landed on Harry's shoulder.

"I'll take her," said Harry.

"Then you'll need the essentials too," the man eyed both bird and boy wearily. "We have owl stands for thirty knuts, owl treats, they come in a box of fifty and cost ten knuts, and cages are fifty knuts."

"No cage will be needed," Harry decided. He had been caged up in his youth, there was no way would he cage another being up, animal or otherwise. "I will take one owl stand, and ten boxes of owl treats."

After paying for his owl (He named her Hedwig), Harry found himself eating at a bacon and ham sandwich at a small café. He fed some bacon to Hedwig as he ate. When he finished his meal he let Hedwig fly off and stretch her wings.

Harry went to Flourish & Blotts, a bookshop where the shelves were stacked to the ceiling with books as large as paving stones bound in

leather; books the size of postage stamps in covers of silk; books full of peculiar symbols and a few books with nothing in them at all. He made his way to a clerk to help him grab what he needed, "I need the standard first year textbooks for Hogwarts. I also need books on important people in the wizarding world, a book on Ancient and Noble Houses, wizarding etiquette and social mores, and – oh! I also need a book or two on Goblins, like their language and culture and all that."

Nearly an hour later Harry had all the books he asked for and then some. He had found several books he thought would be useful supplemental tools for his classes, along with his class books there was a book on current policies and laws in the wizarding world, several books on defense, curses and counter-curses, a book on dueling and a few extra potion books with more complex potions in them. Harry was glad when he paid for them all, because they had been overflowing from the basket even with the expansion and featherweight charms placed on it.

Next, Harry went and bought a pewter cauldron, and a few copper ones, as well as a nice set of scales for weighing potion ingredients. Then he went to the apothecary, which was fascinating enough to make up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor; jars of herbs, dried roots, and bright powders lined the walls; bundles of feathers, strings of fangs, and snarled claws hung from the ceiling. Harry asked the man behind the counter for several sets of basic ingredients, as well as a few of the more esoteric substances he saw that he felt would be useful. With his potion ingredients bought, he made his way to the place where he would buy what he had been wanting the most...a wand.

The shop was narrow and shabby. Peeling gold letters over the door read Ollivander: Makers of Fine wands since 382 B.C. A single wand lay on a faded purple cushion in the dusty window.

A tinkling bell rang somewhere in the depths of the shop as Harry stepped inside. It was a tiny place, empty except for a single spindly chair. Almost as soon as he entered Harry had felt like he was under the microscope, as if someone was observing him. He looked around at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly right up to the ceiling. He could feel a prickling on the back of his neck. He could almost sense the magic in this room, it seemed to tingle with it.



"Good afternoon," said a soft voice. Harry's reaction was instantaneous, spinning on the balls of his feet and moving into a defensive stance –

– only to blink as he saw an old man standing before him, his wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop.

"I take it you own this shop," said Harry, more for a desire to say something, than actually having something to say. He wondered how this man had been able to sneak up on him, constant training had ensured only someone of the same caliber as Master Wei could even hope to come up behind him unnoticed. And this man didn't look like anything special aside from the creepy stare.

"I am, yes," said the man. "Hmm, yes, yes. I thought I'd be seeing you soon. Harry Potter." It wasn't a question. "You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. Nice wand for charm work.

Mr. Ollivander moved closer to Harry, piercing him with his silvery eyes.

"Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favored it – it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course."

Mr. Ollivander had come so close that he and Harry were almost touching nose to nose. Harry took a step back, feeling his personal space invaded.

"I'm sorry to say I sold the wand that did it," he said softly. "Thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands...well, if I'd known that wand was going out into the world to do..."

He shook his head and seemed to snap himself out of his introspective moment, "well, now – Mr. Potter. Let me see." He pulled a long tape measure with silver markings out of his pocket. "Which is your wand arm?"

"Uh – I'm ambidextrous sir," said Harry.

"Really! Well that will make the search more interesting, far more interesting. However I only require one arm." Harry chose his right, and was measured from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit and round his head. As he measured, he said, "Every Ollivander wand has a core of a powerful magical substance, Mr. Potter. We use Unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons, or phoenix are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."

Harry suddenly realized that the tape measure, which was measuring between his nostrils, was doing this on its own. Mr. Ollivander was flitting around the shelves, taking down boxes.

"That will do," he said, and the tape measure stopped what it was doing on its own. "Right then, Mr. Potter. Try this one. Beechwood and dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave."

Harry took the wand and (feeling foolish) waved it around a bit, but Mr. Ollivander snatched it out of his hand almost at once.

"Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Quite whippy. Try –"

Harry tried – but he had hardly raised the wand when it, too, was snatched back by Ollivander.

"No, no – here, ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches, springy. Go on, go on, try it out."

Harry tried. And tried. He had no idea what Mr. Ollivander was waiting for. The pile of tried wands was mounting higher and higher on the spindly chair, but the more wands Mr. Ollivander pulled from the shelves, the happier he seemed to become.

"Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, we'll find the perfect match here somewhere – I wonder, now – yes, why not – unusual combination – holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple."

Harry took the wand. Almost before his hand touched it he felt a negative reaction from it. He waved it anyways, and was surprised when he was nearly blown off his feet. A large explosion came from the tip and crashed into the wall, destroying it.

"I don't think this is my wand," Harry said as he shook his head to clear it.

"No, it appears not," Mr. Ollivander frowned, he seemed disappointed, as if he had been expecting that wand to be his. He looked over at the mass amounts of damage caused and flicked his own wand at it. The pieces of debris began flying around, covering up and repairing the wall, blocking the people who had stopped to gawk at the damage from where they stood.

"This is a dilemma yes," he muttered, staring at Harry. "It seems that none of my wands suit you."

"So what I do?" asked Harry, feeling a little bit of despair at the man's words, "I need a wand right?" Well, he could use wandless magic but he didn't think that would go over too well, or it would get him too much publicity.

A gleam entered Mr. Ollivander's eyes. "It seems I will need to craft a wand specifically for you. This is highly unusual, most rare. Most witches and wizards can work with a wand that is not custom made just for them, however it seems you are a most special case..." he trailed off before moving towards the back, "follow me Mr. Potter."

Harry followed the old wand maker into a room in the back. It looked like a workshop of some kind, there was wood cutting equipment, blank pieces of wood, jars and containers filled with feathers and other items he had never seen before. He felt some excitement as he looked around, especially after hearing that very few people would ever need to get a wand made just for them.

"The creation of a wand is finding the right combination of both wand core and wood type to fit the wizard. After that I can begin the process of creating a wand and assimilating it with the core. The last part of the process, which is usually left to the witch or wizard who owns the wands, is adding runes to help better customize the wand to you," Mr. Ollivander said as he readied his supplies, lining up every jar, vial and wood type that he had in the room.

"Now, I want you to walk around the room slowly and you'll feel a pull from various objects on the shelves. These substances are drawn to your magic, and when used to create a wand, will act as a focus for your magic. I want you to gather the items you feel connected to and place them on this table."

Harry started walking around the room, feeling the pull on his magic from eight different core substances, he only recognized a few of them because they were feathers, though what they belonged to, Harry didn't know. He moved towards the types of wood and picked up four different selections.

"Hmmm, interesting," Mr. Ollivander watched as Harry placed his selections on the table. "Most people will never have more than one, maybe two cores and wood types that match their magic since different cores are better suited for different types of magic. It seems, Mr. Potter, that you are full of surprises."

"Now, to select the suitable core for your wand, you must place your hand on each core that you felt the pull from, afterwards, tell me what you feel from that particular core..."

Harry touched the first one lightly, a black, smoky substance in a jar and felt cold, like death had engulfed him, it was an uncomfortable feeling. Mr. Ollivander saw the reaction and grabbed the jar, placing it on another table. He gestured for Harry to continue.

The next several minutes were spent like this, Harry ended up getting a strong reaction from two of the substances, a silvery feather that seemed to glow and gave him a feeling of invulnerability, and a dark purple substance that felt acidic and dangerous.

"Two cores," Mr. Ollivander whispered, excitement in his voice. "Never in my life have I heard of someone who would have two cores in their wand, and such opposites."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry.

Mr. Ollivander looked at him. "The first core you chose was a Griffin feather, a legendary creature with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. The griffin is a very powerful and majestic creature; they are generally called the king of all creatures. Griffins

are known for guarding treasure and priceless possessions. This is one my rarest cores, I have only ever gotten this one, since Griffin's have not been seen in nearly six centuries."

"The second substance is Basilisk Venom, a legendary reptile reputed to be king of serpents and said to have the power to cause death with a single glance and can reach a span of sixty feet long depending on how old they are. Their venom is one of the deadliest substance in the world, and they are considered to be the height of evil." Olivander stared at the substance in the jar, "I have never used a liquid core because they are highly unstable, this is one of the few that I have in my collection and it just seemed like a shame to toss it."

"Those two substances that you have chosen are polar opposites," Mr. Ollivander continued, looking pensive for a moment. "I am not sure what kind of wand they will make if combined, or if such a thing is even possible."

He snapped out of his small fugue a moment later. "Now that we have your core's, I want you choose your wood. It's the same process as your cores, just put a hand on the wood and tell me what you feel."

Harry did as told and like his core's, found two different wood types, a white wood that seemed to glow with an ethereal light, another, pitch black wood that seemed to suck all light around it.

"I am not surprised these two woods suited you," Mr. Ollivander said. "The white wood is called Vita, and is considered to be the essence of life itself. The other one is called Letum, and is it's opposite in every way."

He clapped his hands, rubbing them together excitedly. "Your wand will take about a day Mr. Potter, I suggest, you come back some time tomorrow, I should have it ready by then."

"Very well," Harry said. "I will see you then."

With all of his shopping now done, Harry decided to leave. Now that he knew where Diagon Alley was, he felt confident enough to use a mode of travel he used on occasion, but had never done across this

vast a distance. Finding an alley that possessed not even a soul, Harry's magic swelled and he vanished without a sound.

He appeared again within the comforts of his small room at the Dursleys residence. Hedwig, who had been on his shoulder, hooted, nipped his ear and flew out the window when Harry opened it.

The first thing Harry did when he got home was reach into his robe and pull out the box he retrieved from his mother's vault. He spent a full minute staring at it before he decided to open it. Inside, sitting on a velvety pillow was a wand; one he knew must have belonged to his mother. Harry picked it up and held it reverently; he got a small warm feeling from it. It was different from the feeling of rejection he had gotten from the wands in Ollivanders, he felt more accepted.

Reaching into his packet, he pulled out two items, his trunk, which he regrew by tapping the wand on it twice. Setting his trunk down by his bed, he opened it and pulled his owl stand out of the fourth compartment, placing it near his nightstand.

Feeling tired as the day caught up Harry stripped out of his clothes and fell asleep on his bed.

XoX

Albus Dumbledore sat behind his desk, thinking about the New Year and what it would bring. Harry Potter would be reentering the wizarding world. A monumental event and one to be handled delicately. He wondered who he should have to help guide Harry back to the wizarding world. Perhaps Hagrid? He was loyal after all, and would warn Harry to avoid the darker wizards. His pondering was interrupted when a presence tripped his wards in front of the door to his office.

"Come in," he called out.

The door opened and his Deputy Headmistress walked in.

"Ah, Minerva," said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. "How can I help you?"

"I went to Diagon Alley today before going off to meet the muggle born's," Minerva started. "You will never believe who I met there."

Albus Dumbledore raised an eyebrow, he was tempted to peer into her mind with a light legilimens probe but there was no need since he was sure she would tell him eventually. "And who, if I may ask, did you meet?"

"Harry Potter. Alone."

Dumbledore choked, "excuse me?"

"You heard me Albus," Minerva replied with a stern frown. "I met Harry Potter wondering into the Leaky Cauldron by himself. Apparently he had only received his acceptance letter, with no one to meet him and explain the wizarding world. Not only that, but he very nearly panicked when the people there attempted to mob him. Had I not intervened it is likely he would have blown up all of the tableware in the Leaky Cauldren."

The twinkle disappeared and an uneasy feeling settled over Dumbledore, "please explain what happened Minerva."

XoX

I don't have a whole lot to say on this, so I'll just talk about me. I'll be graduating from college soon, YAY ME! And will soon be going into the real world...

...I feel strangely disappointed that collage is over and frightened.

However! I will not let that get to me, because I am a man! And real men use their fists! Quoted straight from Elfmén.

Enjoy the chapter.

## Chapter 3: The Hogwarts Express and the Sorting Hat

XoX

The morning after getting his supplies had been rather interesting. He had managed to freak out his relatives who had not heard him come in the day before by coming down the stairs. Harry had never told them about his ability to teleport so they did not know he had gotten home. Their reactions had been rather amusing to say the least.

The last month of Harry's summer holiday was spent mostly reading the various books he had gotten. Having felt woefully uninformed about the current history of the wizarding world, he had read *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts*, which told him about the war against Voldemort and his ultimate defeat at the hands of none other than Harry himself. The raven haired youth had nearly snorted at how the book seemed to fantasize the dark lords defeat, making it seem like he had battled Voldemort in a duel to death despite only being one year old.

Harry also read about Goblins from the two books he got, *Goblin Customs and Cultures*, a fairly self-explanatory book, and *Goblin friend*, a book that taught the basics of the Goblin language known as *Gobbledegook*. He felt that learning about the beings who controlled his money was important and these books would help him when he dealt with them next time he went to Gringotts.

Wanting to know more about Hogwarts, he had read some of the book *Hogwarts, A History* in order to find out what he could. From it he had read the school had been founded by four exceptionally powerful witches and wizards, they were the greatest of their time and went by the names Godric Gryffindor, Rowena Ravenclaw, Helga Hufflepuff and Salazar Slytherin. They had built Hogwarts as a means to help teach those who showed the potential to use magic and as a safe haven when the witch hunts began.

Another very important subject was wizarding customs and etiquette. While he really did not care what others thought about him, he knew the benefits of making sure he did not seem like a buffoon in front of the entire wizarding world, and with who he was, he would be displayed to the entire world, whether he liked it or not.



He had read up on many of the customs, social mores, proper titles to use and anything else that he could learn within a month. He was confident that he would be capable of proper social behavior so long as he was only dealing with his peers and teachers, though if he had to go to any kind of social party he would be in trouble. One of the things Harry had not been able to do was learn dancing, a necessity when it came to dealing with politically powerful figures since balls were often held. However he was sure that he would be capable of handling anything Hogwarts had to offer.

He had only read the first few chapters of his class books; he had not gone any further since he was going to be learning what was in those books at school anyway and had yet to choose his study ahead topic. There was also the little fact that he could not use magic, beyond the wandless magic he was capable of.

Of course, that had brought up an interesting question. Was his wandless magic the same as what he could do with a wand? He knew that for the spells he would need a wand, but what about his ability to levitate? Or summon? Was his ability to transform one object into something else the same as the Transfiguration taught at Hogwarts? These were questions he suspected he would need to find out for himself, especially since he had no intention of telling anyone about his wandless abilities.

Another branch of magic he was interested in was potions. It was the only subject he could do that did not require a wand. Because of this fact Harry had gone through the entire potions book, as well as practiced brewing a few of the potions in the book. So far he could make a boil-cure potion, burn-healing paste, pepper-up potion, sleeping draught and vitamin mix near perfectly. He figured the subject was so easy because it was similar to cooking in a way, getting the right amount of ingredients and mixing them properly was right up his alley.

With a desire to see and experience more of the wizarding world, Harry had gone back to Diagon Alley several times. After exploring several shops he had bought a few items that he felt would be useful. At an armory apparel store he had managed to buy two wand holsters, one for his forearm and one that went around his ankle and hid in his boots. Both were made of dragon hide from a Hungarian Horntail, with the one on his forearm being for his wand, and his ankle holster fitting his mother's willow wand.

The day after he had first entered Diagon Alley he had gone back and gotten his new wand. It was twelve-and-a-quarter inches, with the handle being made from the dark Letum wood, and the shaft from Vita. He still remembered the look of surprise on Ollivander's face when he had waved his wand and created a stream of sparks that nearly lit the store on fire, they likely would have were it not for the protection wards the wand maker had set up for just such an occasion. Harry could still remember the mans last words, "never in all my years have I made such a powerful wand. I expect amazing things from you Mr. Potter."

Harry had left that day with a light feeling as he held his wand.

Because all of the telescopes he had seen at Diagon Alley were horrible sixteenth century telescopes, Harry had gone into muggle London a few days after his first shopping trip and bought one from a muggle store. He had read in Hogwarts, A History that magic disrupted Muggle electronics and so nothing that required electricity would work at Hogwarts. Since he could not use anything battery powered Harry ended up buying one of the less powerful, but still phenomenally better Muggle telescopes, a Cassegrain Telescope.

Aside from his self-study and trips to Diagon Alley, Harry had spent several extra hours at the dojo, where Master Wei had proceeded to beat him across the matt. His sensei had also made him promise that he would continue practicing at school; Harry knew if he didn't, then Master Wei would really open up a can of whoop-ass on him when he returned.

Another person he had spent more time with was Lisa. When he had told the girl and her family that he was going to a new school and that she would likely not see him for an entire year, the girl had cried herself to sleep while clinging to him. This had forced Harry to stay the night as no matter what he or her parents did could get her to let go, short of hurting her. Despite looking frail, Lisa had a strong grip. Of course, that had just given her parents another excuse to take pictures of the two of them, much to Harry's embarrassment.

The morning Harry was supposed to get to the train station to go to school, he informed his aunt during breakfast.

"So you'll be going to that school today, will you?" Vernon grunted as he ate some of the food Harry prepared.

"Yes sir," said Harry.

"And I take it you'll be needing a ride then?"

Harry shook his head, "no, I won't. I already have a means of travel to get to the train station."

"Good, I wasn't gonna drive you anyways."

Harry rolled his eyes, small threats like that had become more prevalent in the past month; he figured it was a way for Vernon to get his kicks in since he couldn't harm him physically. Once everyone had finished with breakfast Harry brought the plates to the sink, where he washed and dried them before setting them away.

After that it was time to go. All of his clothes, school supplies and even Hedwig and her perch had been placed in his trunk, which had in turn been placed in the pocket of the new red dragon hide jacket he had got in Diagon Alley. He turned towards his relatives and said, "well, I guess this is it." He was tempted to say something cocky and insulting, but in the end all he could think to say was, "see ya."

And then he disappeared, leaving the three Dursleys to freak out.

XoX

The next spot he appeared in was a small alley next to Kings Cross that was almost always abandoned. He had been sure to get a clear image of where he wanted to teleport to, right behind the dumpster where no one else would look. Harry wrinkled his nose at the smell of the dumpster and was pleased he had the foresight to get his clothes charmed with constant refreshing charms as he walked out of the alley and into Kings Cross, where he got to Platforms nine and ten.

The platform he was supposed to go on was nine and three-quarters. There was no indication that platform nine and three-quarters existed of course. There was a big plastic number nine over one platform and a big plastic number ten over the one next to it, and in the middle, nothing at all.

This of course was all because there was a magic barrier he had to pass in order to get to platform nine and three-quarters. Harry looked at the dividing barrier between the two platforms. Aunt Petunia, who had been here when Harry's mother had started Hogwarts had told him that he had to walk through that barrier.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, Harry strode forward, only closing his eyes at the last minute as he was about to hit the barrier. He didn't hit it, and instead felt a slight static-like feel as he passed through the magical barrier. It reminded him of one of the times Lisa had rubbed a balloon on his head to make it stand on end.

Opening his eyes Harry was greeted with the sight of a scarlet steam engine waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said Hogwarts Express, ten o'clock. Harry looked behind him and saw a wrought-iron archway where the barrier had been, with the words Platform Nine and Three-quarters on it.

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while cats of every color wound here and there between their legs. Owls hooted to one another in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks. Harry found himself wondering why none of them seemed to have a shrinking charm on their trunks, or a featherweight charm at the very least.

The first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats. Harry began to walk down the platform in search of an empty compartment. He passed a round-faced boy who was saying, "Gran, I've lost my toad again."

"Oh, Neville," he heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small crowd.

"Give us a look, Lee, go on."

The boy lifted the lid of a box in his arms, and the people around him shrieked and yelled as something inside poked out a long, hairy leg.

Harry pressed on through the crowd until he found an empty compartment near the end of the train. The first thing he did when

he got inside was to pull his trunk out of his pocket and set it on the ground, then pulled out his wand, tapped the trunk twice and stepped back as it grew. The first thing he did was open the fourth compartment and let Hedwig fly out and land on his shoulder. She nipped his ear, a little harder than usual almost as if she were scolding him.

"Sorry girl, I know it's probably not the greatest in there," Harry apologized. "But it has to be better than a cage." Hedwig nipped him again, softer this time like she was accepting his apology.

Since he could finally do magic (with a wand) he decided he would try out one of the spells he had read about in one of his books. With a small swish and flick of his wand, and an incantation of "Wingardium Leviosa," the trunk moved a little but did not lift like he wanted. Harry frowned and attempted several more times. After several seconds he realized what he was doing wrong, it must require visualization and intent, the wand movements likely weren't enough to truly make the spell work, much like his wandless magic worked. He tried one more time and was finally successful, the trunk lifted and slotted itself into the small alcove overhead.

He sat down in the compartment and watched through the window as parents said good-bye to their children and pushed them towards the train. Around half an hour since he sat down, Harry saw a family of red-heads emerge from the platform with just a few minutes left to go before the train left, they said a quick goodbye to each other, and he noticed the mother, a plump woman, speaking a few words to her youngest son. He ignored the rest of the exchange and pulled a small book out of an expanded pocket in his jacket, it was the journal of Charlus Potter, who had been the Head of the House of Potter before getting killed during the war with Voldemort. Charlus was Harry's grandfather. It had taken a bit of negotiating and bribing to convince the Goblins to let him take it from the Potter Family vault.

The train began to move. Harry looked up from his book and noticed that the boys' mother was waving and their sister, who by the looks of her was the youngest, was half laughing, half crying, running to keep up with the train until it gathered too much speed, and then she fell back and waved.

Harry watched the girl and his mother disappear as the train rounded the corner. Houses flashed past the window. Harry could

not keep the excitement away, even as he went back to his book. He would finally be learning about his heritage, how to do magic, more than just the few wandless bits he could do. Just then the door of the compartment slid open and the youngest red-headed boy came in.

"Anyone else sitting there?" he asked, pointing at the seat opposite Harry. "Everywhere else is full."

"Go ahead," said Harry after watching the red-head closely, the boy sat down. He glanced at Harry and then looked quickly out of the window, pretending he hadn't looked.

"Hey, Ron."

The two twins Harry had seen with the family of red-heads came in.

"Listen, we're going down the middle of the train – Lee Jordan's got a giant tarantula down there."

"Right," mumbled Ron.

They looked from Ron to Harry before leaving.

"So, I'm Ron," the red-head introduced himself.

Harry wondered whether or not he should introduce himself using his full name. He really didn't want to deal with any hero worship, but he knew that Ron, and everyone else for that matter would find out soon anyways. It may be best to just get it over with now.

"Harry Potter," said Harry curtly.

Ron's eyes widened, "are you really Harry Potter?"

Harry nodded, eying the boy wearily. Ron looked like someone had just struck him with lightning. The kid was staring at him with wide eyes and a gaping jaw, and was that drool coming out of his mouth?

"Then have you really got – you know..."

"Don't you think it's a little too soon to be asking something so personal?" asked Harry, he kept his voice even but if this boy asked such tasteless questions he was going to get annoyed really fast.

Ron's ears turned red and he mumbled something under his breath, whether it was an apology or something else Harry didn't know. There was more silence between the two and Harry noticed Ron continued to stare at him several times, only to turn his head and look out the window when caught. Finally Ron broke the silence, "so, do you remember when..."

"Are you actually asking me if I remember the night my parents were murdered!" asked Harry incredulously, anger beginning to seep into his tone. Ron shrank back in his seat as Harry eyes actually began to glow, and the red-haired boy thought he actually saw sparks within Harry's eyes. "Where you do get the gull to go about asking such a personal and tasteless question! Would you want me asking that if it had been your parents who were killed!"

Harry did not give Ron any time to answer as he stood up; a startled Hedwig flew off him as he grabbed his trunk and pulled it down, and landed back on his shoulder a second later and looked at him curiously. Harry opened the compartment door and shot one last glare at Ron, "Until you can learn to speak with some tact, don't, ever! Speak to me again!"

The door slammed as Harry stalked out, he marched down the train for several feet before closing his eyes. It took several deep breaths and a basic meditation exercise of picturing a lake with a waterfall in his mind before he was calm enough to think clearly. Harry berated himself for getting so angry, he was better than this! Though to be fair, Ron had asked extremely personal questions, ones that should never be asked by anyone, let alone someone he had just met. Feeling better Harry began to make his way down the train again in search of a new compartment.

"Excuse me," Harry turned around when he heard the bossy voice behind him. The voice belonged to a girl with lots of bushy hair, and rather large front teeth. "Have you seen a toad?" she asked. "Neville's lost one."

"No," Harry shook his head, "sorry." He had to speak slowly because he was still a little angry, and didn't want to take it out on

someone who had not done anything wrong to him, he didn't want to become like the Dursleys.

"Oh, I'll have to look somewhere else then," the girl said. Harry watched as she walked off before starting his search again.

Most of the compartments were filled to capacity, but Harry eventually found one with only two people in it. Harry knocked on the door before he opened it, "excuse me? Would you mind if I sit there," he pointed to the empty seat opposite the two girls, a cute girl with red hair and light grayish-blue eyes, and another who had blond hair and blue eyes.

They both turned to look at him, going from his eyes, to the owl perched on his shoulder. They looked at each other, then after a moment the blond smiled at him and said, "not at all. Take a seat," she gestured to the seat opposite of them.

"Thanks," Harry said as he set his trunk down and floated it back up like he had in the previous compartment.

"Oh, wow," the blond said as Harry sat down, "That was so cool."

Harry blinked for a few seconds as he looked at the blond, "erm, what was?"

"Your magic," she answered. "I haven't been able to do any spells, of course, we're not allowed to practice magic outside of school, but its really cool to see that you can do it."

"You think so?" Harry rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. This was just great, he had assumed everyone would be capable of the basic spells, now he was really gonna stand out, well, more then he would as The-Boy-Who-Lived.

"It was really impressive," the red head said, deciding to enter the conversation after being silent up to this point. "I tried practicing with my Aunties wand on occasion but never really managed to get any spells down. Have you practiced often?"

"Well, no," Harry had never done magic with a wand before a few minutes ago, though it was actually easier once he realized that it



was still the same process as his wandless magic. "I just tried that spell a few seconds ago when I was in my first compartment."

"First compartment?" questioned the blond.

"Yeah, I was in another one but this red headed kid was being invasive, asking all these really personal questions," Harry said.

"Like what?" asked the blond.

"Just questions that weren't any of his business," Harry replied evasively. He decided to try and change the subject so that they would stop asking him questions. "So I don't think I got either of your names?" he said.

"That's right!" the blond said, eyes widening as if she couldn't believe she had forgotten something so basic as introductions. "I'm Hannah Abbott, and she's Susan Bones."

"Nice to meet you," Harry said.

"So what's your name?" asked Susan.

"Harry," he said, deciding not to give out his last name, they would likely find out eventually but he really didn't want to have another Ron experience.

"Harry?" asked Hannah.

"Yep," Harry replied.

"Harry...Potter?"

"Please don't tell me you're going to get all invasive and ask rude questions too?" Harry groaned.

That seemed to stop the two girls short, they looked at each other for a moment, then turned back to him.

"Was what the question the boy you mentioned asked really that bad?" asked Susan in a shy voice, a rather large blush staining her cheeks.

Harry looked at the two of them. Ever since his sensei had taught him how to predict people based on their movements he had become much more observant. As a small experiment, he had read up on human psychology and practiced reading people based on their movements and facial expressions, taking his observations to predict movement to another level. He had been observing and analyzing the pair in front of him from the moment he had stepped into their compartment, just like he had nearly everyone else he met.

Susan was shy, the way she only spoke occasionally and the soft tone she used was evidence enough. She was also lightly clinging to a small book bag like a lifeline, a sign of nervous tension. She may be a bit more open with people she knew, or maybe she was nervous about going to school, but he could tell that she was a very soft spoken girl.

On the other hand, Hannah seemed almost her polar opposite in how she acted. She was much louder, more open and seemed to be an in general chatterbox. However, in this case it was also a sign of nerves, just a different way of dealing with them.

Both seemed to have known each other for a while, aside from having been sitting together, it was obvious from the way they seemed to draw comfort from the others presence, and they both offset each other nicely. Hannah boldness would act as a balance for Susan's shyness.

He heaved an internal sigh, both of them seemed sincere enough, and he didn't know enough of the wizarding world to just alienate them. That meant he had to at least, ensure he was on good terms with them.

"That depends," he shrugged at last. "Do you consider asking me if I remember the night my parents were killed a rude question?"

Susan brought a hand up to her mouth as a horrified expression crossed her face. "Did someone really ask you that?" she asked in a quiet voice.

Hannah's reaction was much different, but amounted to the same thing. She gasped, loudly, and in an equally loud voice said, "I can't

believe someone would be so...so heartless! Asking another person something so personal and painful!"

"Well, it's good to know you two won't be doing that," Harry said lightly, giving a small smile to them now that he knew they wouldn't do the same thing that Ron boy did. He paused for a moment before adding, "and I think he was more oblivious and stupid then actually trying to be heartless."

Neither of the girls commented on his last comment.

"So your Harry Potter? The Harry Potter?" asked Susan, blushing when Harry turned an amused gaze on her.

"I don't know about The Harry Potter," he said after ensuring her blush had changed to the same color as Ron's hair. "However, I am a Harry Potter, then again, I don't know anyone else with my name so..." he shrugged.

"Do you really have the scar?" Hannah blurted out.

Harry looked at her for a long moment. "I thought you weren't going to ask me any real personal questions?" he said with a raised eyebrow.

Hannah had the decency to blush. "Sorry," she apologized, "it's just, your scar is one of the things that are widely known about you. It's like a symbol in the wizarding world."

Harry really didn't know how people knew about his scar, unless this Dumbledore character who found him decided to reveal absolutely everything that he knew. He wondered why the man, whom he had read was considered the most powerful wizard of his time, would release that kind of information, and then leave Harry to the tender mercies of his relatives with almost no knowledge of the events that led to his fame. It was a question he would have to look into when he could.

"To you, and everyone else in the wizarding world it may seem like some kind of great symbol, or a measure of my fame," Harry said slowly. "But to me, all my scar represents is how I lost both of my parents in a single night."

He really didn't feel comfortable telling them that, while Harry always remained, for the most part friendly, he didn't trust easily and didn't like revealing his secrets and past unless he had to. Still, maybe if they knew why he didn't like to talk about his scar and fame, they would understand and drop the subject.

"Oh," Hannah's voice was small, "I'm sorry, I guess, no one really thought about what it would mean to you."

"That's alright," Harry said, shrugging. "By nature, humans really only care about things that affect them directly, no one else really bothers to realize that my parents were killed the night Voldemort died." He looked at both of them to see their shocked and pale faces, "what?"

"How can you say his name so easily?" asked Susan, her voice taking on a tone between awed and horrified.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I won't fear someone so much I can't even speak their name, that's essentially giving that person power over you and I will not allow that, especially from a dead man."

"My auntie says the same thing," Susan said. "Sort of, she told me that fearing a name equals fear of the thing itself."

"Your aunts' pretty smart then," said Harry.

"So what house do you think you'll be in?" asked Hannah, smoothly changing the subject. She did not feel comfortable talking about Voldemort so openly.

"I'm not sure," said Harry, shrugging indifferently. "I've read up on the houses and from what I've read they seem to sort you by your most prolific trait. Personally, I don't put much stock into the houses, I'll be in whatever house they place me in. What about you two?"

"Hufflepuff," Susan said instantly, "my auntie was in Hufflepuff."

"I'll probably be in either Hufflepuff or Gryffindor," said Hannah. "Personally, I think I would rather be in Hufflepuff."

Around half past twelve there was a great clattering outside in the corridor and a smiling, dimpled woman slid back their door and said, "Anything off the cart, dears?"

Harry looked at the odd assortment of sweets, he had never much cared for high sugary substances but he was curious to see if Wizard candy was different then Muggle sweets. He looked over at Susan and Hannah, "any suggestions?"

"I like the chocolate frogs," Hannah said. "Of course, you've also got to get the Bertie Bott's Every Flavored Beans."

"You have to be careful with those though," Susan added in a helpful voice. "When they say every flavor, they mean it. My auntie once said she got a bogey flavored one."

Harry grimaced at the thought of eating something that tasted like snot, Dudley would love it though, he ate his boogers all the time. "Right, chocolate frogs it is, then."

Harry ended up buying himself a few chocolate Frogs, one Pumpkin Pasty and a box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, just because Hannah was insistent that they weren't all bad. Taking one of the Chocolate Frogs first Harry opened the package, but did not get the frog, being too surprised to catch it when it sprang to life, then hopped onto and out of the window.

"You've got to be careful with those," said Hannah, who was eating a Pumpkin Pasty. "They tend to have a habit of jumping away."

Harry scowled a bit but didn't say anything as he opened another one, acting with reflexes honed from years of Martial Arts, he caught the frog mid leap. Stuffing the frog in his mouth Harry decided that Wizarding sweets weren't bad, but aside from them moving they were not much different from Muggle sweets.

"Don't forget the cards," Susan added, making Harry look up at her, a frog leg hanging out of his mouth before he managed to slurp it up and swallow the frog.

"Card?" asked Harry.

"In the package," said Susan. "Each frog comes with a card of a famous witch or wizard."

Harry grabbed the two cards from the packages he had opened. It showed a man's face. He wore half-moon glasses, had a long, crooked nose, and flowing silver hair, beard, and mustache. Underneath the picture was the name Albus Dumbledore.

Harry showed it too Hannah and Susan.

"Dumbledore I see, he's not that rare as far as cards go. There's a biography on the back," Hannah said.

Turning the card over Harry saw that there was indeed a small biography that read:

ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

Currently Headmaster of Hogwarts

Considered by many to be the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.

Harry turned the card back over and saw, much to his surprise, that Dumbledore's face had vanished.

"Where did he go?"

Hannah looked at the card and shrugged, "well you can't expect him to just stay in there can you?"

Sure enough a few seconds later Dumbledore sidled back into the picture on his card and gave him a small smile. "Weird," said Harry.

"Don't you know about these things?" asked Susan as she took one of the Bertie Bott's beans and ate it.

"No," said Harry, "I grew up in the muggle world."

"But what about all those stories?" asked Hannah, blushing a bit when both Susan and Harry turned to her.

"You mean the stories about me fighting trolls every single day of the week, and taming dragons for a weekend hobby?" asked Harry, snorting. "I've never even seen a troll, or a dragon. I hadn't even met another wizard until a month ago."

"So then what's with all those stories?" asked Susan with a disappointed look.

"I don't know," Harry shrugged. "I only know of them because I saw a book with my name on it and wondered what people were writing about me for. Does that disappoint you?"

"Well, not really, I guess," Susan paused and seemed to be thinking. Eventually she shrugged, "it's just that we've heard all these stories about you and to find out none of them are true is, well, disheartening I guess."

"Yeah, I can see that," said Harry. "Though, you'll have to forgive me if I don't care much beyond the point that someone obviously falsified stories of my life."

"I can understand why," Hannah said. "Personally, I'd be right angry if someone wrote stories of me without my knowledge and those stories weren't true."

They talked for a while, Harry learned a few things about the pair, like the fact that they grew up together due to Hannah's family having been friends with Susan's. When he had asked about Susan's parents she had told him they died in the war, Harry had apologized profusely, feeling terrible for bringing up bad memories when he himself had just complained about someone else doing that very thing. Susan had smiled and told him not to worry about it, that he couldn't have known so it wasn't like he was asking about her parents death. After a little while conversation deviated. It was nearly half an hour later that the compartment door slid open.

Three boys entered, the one in the middle was a pale boy with a pointed face and slicked back blond hair. The way the boy held himself, with an arrogant gait and upturned nose, to make it so that

he looked like he was looking down on you, gave the impression of a spoiled child.

"Is it true?" the pointed faced boy asked. "They're saying all down the train that Harry Potter's in this compartment. Is it you?"

"Yes," replied Harry warily. He looked at the other two boys. Both of them were thickset and reminded Harry of gorilla's, obviously they were bodyguards of the pale boy. All three had the typical aura of bullies. He was not sure what this boy wanted, but if it ended in a fight Harry would take them out first.

"Oh, this is Crabbe and this is Goyle," said the pale boy carelessly, noticing where Harry's eyes had traveled. "And my name's Malfoy, Draco Malfoy."

"I see," said Harry, the way he said that made it seem like Harry should know the name. "And what was it you wanted with me?"

"You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there."

He held out his hand to shake Harry's, an important aspect in the wizarding world since to shake the hand of another was the same as giving your allegiance to that person. Due to the boys arrogant tone and veiled threat hidden in the wording, Harry did not shake his hand.

"I'm sorry, but no one tells me what I can and can't do," Harry said evenly. "That includes you."

Draco Malfoy didn't go red, but a pink tinge appeared on his pale cheeks.

"I'd be careful if I were you, Potter," he said slowly. "Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents. They didn't know what was good for them, either."

Harry's eyes narrowed, "I would watch your mouth when you talk about my family, the last person who did ended up with their face planted into hard pavement."



Draco's eyes narrowed, "I wouldn't go around threatening your betters, Potter. Perhaps I should teach you a lesson."

Crabbe and Goyle moved forward on a signal from Draco. Before they could go far, Harry pulled out his wand and point it at Goyle, he did not want to fight unless he had to; that meant he had to bluff his way out.

"Just try it," goaded Harry. "Perhaps I should do to you what I did to Voldemort all those nights ago?" A cruel smile formed on his face when he saw Goyle pale and take a step back. "Well?"

The standoff lasted only a few seconds before Crabbe and Goyle bolted out, leaving Draco alone. He seemed to dither a few seconds before sneering, "This isn't the end, Potter." A few seconds later the door closed as Malfoy left. With a weary sigh Harry returned his wand to its holster and sat back down.

"I can't believe you just told off Draco Malfoy," said Hannah, looking at him with a grin that let him know she enjoyed the confrontation.

"Really? Is he something special in wizarding society?" asked Harry curiously.

"His father is," Susan answered, bringing Harry's attention to her. She blushed a bit but continued, "he's a big time player on the Wizengamot."

"That's part of the governing body of Wizarding Britain, right?" said Harry.

"Yes," Susan nodded, "anyways his father was a big time Death Eater but managed to get away clean by claiming to be under the Imperius Curse and bribing the judges. Now he can pretty much do whatever he wants because he's the one who's filling Minister Fudge's coffers."

So money equaled power in the wizarding world; that would be useful for Harry to know, he was pretty rich, though he didn't want to have to bribe anyone just to get what he wanted. That was petty. Still, that information was useful.

"So he was a Death Eater, huh?"

Death Eaters were the name of the group that had followed Voldemort during the war. They were well known for killing anyone who was Muggle, muggle-born, or opposed their ideals. They also had no trouble killing those they considered blood-traitors. They were a group as violent as they came, and though they disbanded officially, Harry knew there would still be a few who would secretly keep to their roots. People like that don't just turn over a new leaf.

"Yes, one of You-Know-Who's inner circle," Susan said.

Looking outside Hannah noticed the train was slowing down and said, "we'd better get our robes on."

Harry shucked off his red dragon hide jacket and pulled out his long black robes. After throwing them over his head he left the compartment so the girls could change.

A voice echoed through the train: "We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes' time. Please leave your luggage on the train; it will be taken to the school separately."

Harry looked at Hedwig and asked, "Think you can find your way to me after I find out what house I'm in?"

"You don't honestly expect your owl to answer you, do you?" asked Hannah laughingly.

Hedwig turned her attention on Hannah and gave a loud, barking hoot, startling the blond girl. Turning back to Harry she hooted in what he took to be an affirmative and flew out of the window he had opened.

"Strange bird," Susan muttered.

The train slowed down and finally came to a stop. People pushed their way toward the door and out on to a tiny, dark platform. Harry looked around to find out where he was supposed to go. Then a lamp came bobbing over the heads of the students, and Harry heard a loud voice:

"Firs' years! Fir's years over here!"

A giant of a man could be seen over the sea of heads. His face was almost completely hidden by a long shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.

"C'mon, follow me – any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!"

Harry found himself relying on his balance training as he and the rest of the first years followed the large man down a steep, narrow path. It was dark on either side of them, but Harry could make out the trees that lined the sides of the path. Nobody spoke much. Neville, the boy who kept losing his toad, sniffed once or twice.

"Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec," the giant called over his shoulder, "jus' round this bend here."

A few seconds later there was a loud, "Ooooh!"

The narrow path had opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers. Harry had to admit, the sight was impressive, the imposing castle reminded him of the castles he had read about existing during the middle ages.

"No more'n four to a boat!" said the giant man, pointing to a fleet of little boats in the water by the shore. Susan and Hannah had somehow managed to get separated from Harry and he ended up getting in a boat with a dark skinned boy with slanted eyes, a brunette, who Harry recognized from Madame Malkins, and a pretty girl with honey blond hair, dark blue eyes and soft, regal features.

"Everyone in?" asked the man, who had a boat to himself. "Right then – FORWARD!"

And the fleet of little boats moved off all at once, gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

The dark skinned boy whistled, "that's some castle."

"I'll say," said the brunette mostly to herself. Her eyes trailed down from the castle and landed on Harry. "Hey! I recognize you!"

"From Madam Malkins, yes?" said Harry, his voice sounding amused.

"That's right," she said. "I don't think I got your name though," she held out her hand, "I'm Tracy Davis."

Harry hesitated only a second before taking the hand in his own, bringing her hand up to his lips, he gently brushed them against her knuckles in a traditional pureblood greeting. He looked up to see her blushing face and smiled. "A pleasure to meet you...my name is Harry Potter."

The reaction he got was almost as amusing as it was annoying. Tracy's eyes boggled, and even the blond, who had held a look of aloof indifference had her eyes widen in surprise.

"Are you really –" asked Tracy.

"Yes," Harry said. He saw Tracy open her mouth to speak, but Harry beat her too it. "No I did not live in a giant magical castle, nor did I kill a troll at five or tame a dragon at eight. I have never even heard of a Nundu, much less fought one and I suggest that you get any other thoughts about those books you likely read about my life out of your head because they are the biggest load of horse shite your ever likely to read."

Tracy's mouth snapped shut and she suddenly looked unsure.

"You need to learn tact," said the dark skinned boy, who looked amused at the exchange.

"And you are?" asked Harry.

"Blaise Zabini," Blaise said, holding out his hand.

"Well I would give my name but I hate repeating myself," Harry took the proffered hand in a firm shake. "Besides, I'm pretty she was going to ask if all the stories were true," he turned an eye to Tracey, "right?"

"Well, yes," admitted Tracy, blushing with a bit of embarrassment at being caught.

"There you go," said Harry. "All those books are written by people who clearly don't know jack about my life, and lied either so they could make money off of my name or fantasize about what they thought I was doing. Why did people actually assume those books were true anyways?"

"Because there was nothing known about where you went after You-Know-Who was defeated," the blond spoke up for the first time.

Harry turned to look at her, "I'm sorry, I don't think I got your name miss..."

"Greengrass, Daphne Greengrass," she said coldly, and Harry noted that she did not offer her hand.

"A pleasure," said Harry. "So how come no one knew what happened to me? I assumed Albus Dumbledore would have told the Ministry where I was, he bloody well informed them of everything else about what happened that night."

"He only informed the world that you were safe, and that for your own safety no one was to know where you were," Tracy answered. She looked thoughtful for a second and added, "I guess since no one knew where you were, people just began speculating about what you were doing. Everyone assumed that Dumbledore would have either taught you magic himself, or had others do it for him."

"I did not think you were allowed to use magic when not in school," said Harry carefully, leaving out that he trained in wandless magic.

"There are other ways to learn about magic besides practicing," said Tracy. "Reading about it, for one."

"And most purebloods don't really listen to the no magic rule anyways," Blaise added. "Most of us have already practiced magic before we even get our wand's."

"How is that?" asked Harry, from what he had read, wandless magic was damn near impossible for most people, the only reason he

could even use it was thanks to his photographic memory. Having the ability to remember every incident of accidental magic had allowed him to reverse engineer it into wandless magic.

Blaise shrugged, "we simply use our parent's wands. The Ministry tracking charms that monitor the use of unlawful magic break when a person reaches seventeen."

Harry filed the knowledge for use when he was back at his aunt and uncles. It would be nice to be able to practice spells during the summer holidays.

"Heads down!" Conversation stopped as the first boats reached the cliff; they all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along underneath a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbor, where they clambered out onto rocks and pebbles.

Harry stepped out of the boat and turned around. He reached out a hand to Daphne, who was closest to him, to help her up. She looked at the hand for a moment before taking it and letting Harry pull her out of the boat and onto solid ground. He did the same with Tracy who flashed him a grateful smile, then caught up with Blaise who looked at him with a raised eyebrow. Harry shrugged.

"Oy, you there! Is this your toad?" asked the giant, who was checking the boats as people climbed out of them.

"Trevor!" cried Neville blissfully, holding out his hands. Then they clambered out at last onto the smooth, damp grass right in the shadows of the castle.

They walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around the huge, oak front door.

"Everyone here? You there, still got yer toad?"

The large man raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

The door swung open at once. Harry recognized the stern face of Minerva McGonagall standing within the entrance.

"The first years, Professor McGonagall," said the giant man.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here."

She pulled the door wide. The entrance hall was so big you could have fit the whole of the Dursleys' house in it. The stone walls were lit with flaming torches like the ones at Gringotts, the ceiling was too high to make out, and a magnificent marble staircase facing them led to the upper floors.

They followed Professor McGonagall across the flagged stone floor. Harry could hear the drone of hundreds of voices from a doorway to the right – the rest of the school must already be here – but Professor McGonagall showed the first years into a small, empty chamber off the hall. They crowded in, standing rather closer together than they would usually have done, Harry felt Tracy get jostled into and grab onto him to steady herself.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," said Professor McGonagall. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory, and spend free time in your house common room."

"The four houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house has its own noble history and each has produced outstanding witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn you house points, while any rule breaking will lose house points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the house cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours."

"The sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest you all smarten yourselves up as much as you can while you are waiting."

Her eyes lingered for a moment on Neville's cloak, which was fastened under his left ear, and on Ron's smudged nose.

"I shall return when we are ready for you," said Professor McGonagall. "Please wait quietly."

She left the chamber and everyone began chattering, wondering how they would be sorted. He looked around at everyone, seeing that they looked as nervous as he felt. Ron was telling anyone who would listen that you had to face a troll in order to be sorted; the bushy haired girl was muttering all of the spells she knew very fast under her breath and wondering which one she would need. Blaise still looked fairly normal, but a thin sheet of sweat had formed on his brow, Daphne looked pale, and Tracy was shaking slightly. Harry closed his eyes and focused his attention on his breathing.

"What are you doing?"

Harry turned to see Daphne staring at him , her cold look was still more or less intact but she also looked slightly curious.

"Breathing exercises," said Harry.

"Why would you need exercise to breathe?" asked Tracy.

Harry shrugged, "its an exercise that helps to calm ones nerves and focus. I do it sometimes when I'm feeling high levels of negative emotion so that I can think clearly."

The three looked at him oddly. Tracy opened her mouth to say something but was cut off when someone near the back screamed.

He, along with the people around him gasped. About twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they glided across the room talking to one another and hardly glancing at the first years. Harry had read about the ghosts that haunted Hogwarts, but like that old saying, reading and seeing are too different things. They seemed to be arguing. What looked like a fat, little monk was saying: "Forgive and forget, I say. We ought to give him a second chance –"

"My dear Friar, haven't we given Peeves all the chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name and you know, he's not really even a ghost – I say, what are you all doing here?"



A ghost wearing tights had suddenly noticed the first years.

Nobody answered.

"New Students!" said the Fat Friar, smiling at them. "About to be sorted I suppose?"

A few people nodded mutely.

"Hope to see you in Hufflepuff!" Said the Friar. "My old house, you know."

"Move along now," said a sharp voice. "The Sorting Ceremony is about to start."

Professor McGonagall had returned. One by one, the ghosts floated away through the opposite wall.

"Now, form a line," Professor McGonagall told the first years, "and follow me."

Harry got himself behind Blaise, with Daphne behind him and Tracy behind her. They walked out of the chamber, back across the hall, and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall.

Despite himself, Harry was staring at the hall in awe. The Great Hall was lit by thousands and thousands of candles that were floating in midair over four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were laid with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting. Professor McGonagall led the first years up here, so that they came to a halt facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candle-light. Dotted here and there among the students, the ghosts shone misty silver. Mainly to avoid all the staring eyes, Harry looked up and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard Hermione whisper, "It's bewitched to look like the sky outside. I read about it in Hogwarts, A History."

Between the teachers table and four house tables, Professor McGonagall silently placed a four legged stool down on the floor. On top of the stool she put a pointed wizard's hat. This hat was patched

and frayed and extremely dirty. As everyone stare at it, a rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth – and the hat began to sing:

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,

But don't judge on what you see,

I'll eat myself if you can find

A smarter hat than me.

You can keep your bowlers black,

Your top hats sleek and tall,

For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat

And I can cap them all.

There's nothing hidden in your head

The Sorting Hat can't see,

So try me on and I will tell you

Where you ought to be.

You might belong in Gryffindor,

Where dwell the brave at heart,

Their daring, nerve, and chivalry

Set Gryffindors apart;

You might belong in Hufflepuff,

Where they are just and loyal,

Those patient Hufflepuffs are true

And unafraid of toil;

Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,  
if you've a ready mind,  
Where those of wit and learning,  
Will always find their kind;  
Or perhaps in Slytherin  
You'll make your real friends,  
Those cunning folk use any means  
To achieve their ends.  
So put me on! Don't be afraid!  
And don't get in a flap!  
You're in safe hands (though I have none)  
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

The whole hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song. It bowed the each of the four tables and then became quite still again.

Harry found himself contemplating the hats words, they told of each of the houses and what they valued, but he felt there was some hidden meaning behind them. He shook himself out of his reverie as Professor McGonagall stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment.

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted," she said. "Abbott, Hannah!"

He saw Hannah move towards the hat several paces away from where he was standing.

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat.

The table on the right cheered and clapped as Hannah went to sit down at the Hufflepuff table. Harry saw the ghost of the Fat Friar waving merrily at her.

"Bones, Susan!"

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat again, and Susan scuttled off to sit next to Hannah.

"Boot, Terry!"

"RAVENCLAW!"

The table second from the left clapped this time; several Ravenclaws stood up to shake hands with Terry as he joined them.

"Brocklehurst, Mandy." went to Ravenclaw too, but "Brown, Lavender." became the first Gryffindor, and the table on the far left exploded with cheers; Harry could see the two twin red-heads cat-calling.

"Bullstrode, Millicent," then became a Slytherin.

Tracy Davis also went into Slytherin, as did Daphne Greengrass. Justin Finch-Fletchley went to Hufflepuff. Hermione Granger, the bushy haired witch became a Gryffindor. Neville Longbottom also went into Gryffindor. Morag McDougal was in Ravenclaw. The hat didn't even touch Malfoy's head before it called Slytherin. The names continued to go on.

"Potter, Harry!"

Harry started when he realized his name was called, he brought up his head and set his shoulders as he marched forward. Whispers broke out all over the hall.

"Potter, did she say?"

"The Harry Potter?"

Harry ignored them, he was determined not to let the whispers and stares bother him. The hat was placed on his head as he sat down.

There was a long moment where absolutely nothing happened, of course, Harry wasn't sure what was supposed to happen. How did a hat determine which house would best suit them?

"Mr. Potter," the hat suddenly spoke out loud. "I need you to lower your Occlumency shields."

There was a gasp of surprise from everyone in the Great Hall. The teachers at the table looked shocked, while Dumbledore leaned forward and frowned as he studied Harry intently.

"My what?" Harry asked with a frown.

"Your Occlumency shields, boy," the hat said, "I need you to lower them."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Harry.

"You mean to tell me you've never heard of Occlumency before?" the hat sounded intrigued.

Harry shrugged his shoulders, "it wasn't in any of the books I had gotten from Diagon Alley."

"Interesting..." the hat paused, "you must have natural Occlumency shields then; Occlumency is the act of protecting your mind from attack."

"So there like barriers set up inside my mind," Harry theorized.

"Exactly."

"Oh, I have those," Harry paused, "why didn't you just say mind shields or something?"

"I did," the hat replied, sounding amused

"Whatever."

Harry closed his eyes for a moment as he felt his way around the confines of his mind, lowering the barrier that protected him. The shields he had set up were designed to keep things in, not out. His sensei had helped him with the meditation required to properly keep

a lock up some of his...more frightening memories. They weren't designed for it but he supposed it would work just as well to keep others out.

"There we go," the voice of the hat now seemed to come from inside his head. "I must say Mr. Potter, you have a very organized mind, Rowena would be most impressed with it."

"Thank you, I do try," Harry replied dryly.

"You would definitely do well in Ravenclaw, especially with that Eidetic memory of yours, it is quite the asset."

"It's also a curse."

"True," the hat admitted, "those like you who have suffered such prolific tragedies would see it that way, though from your memories you also know how to use it to your advantage. Now, let's see which house will truly be best suited towards you. Let's see, you would definitely do well in Ravenclaw, you have a great thirst for knowledge. It seems to be for...hmm? What is this, I sense anger. But why – ah, you are angry that you are so famous and feel you've done nothing to earn it."

"I was one year old, I hardly even understood what was happening at the time. All I did was cry but people make it out like me and Voldemort had some kind of epic duel, so of course it bothers me."

"And you wish to be seen for your own accomplishments, to step out of the shadow your title has cast. That's a most worthy goal, Slytherin would help you accomplish that. Hmmm...but it seems you have a bit of a temper, and with the current climate in the Slytherin Dungeons it's more than likely you'll kill some of them for even breathing the wrong way."

Harry scowled, "I'm not that violent, but I will kick the arse of anyone who tries to make fun of me or my parents."

"That's my point exactly, you may have been able to do well in that house before the rise of Voldemort, but no longer. Now what else is in here, you're certainly not lacking in courage, in fact there seems to be very little that you fear, Gryffindor may be a good house for you." Harry shrugged.

"You don't seem to care much."

"Not really, the houses quite simply are a terrible way to sort in my opinion. You're essentially telling a child, a very young and impressionable child, that because this is their most prevalent trait, they should act a certain way. If you're in Slytherin you're bound to be more traitorous, no thanks to the current climate, if you're in Gryffindor you are supposed to have reckless, idiotic bravery, Ravenclaw means you're a bookworm, and Hufflepuff means you're hardworking and loyal to a fault, though from what I hear, they're also supposed to be much more cowardly."

"So you don't like the way children are sorted?"

Harry could feel a growl trying to make its way out from the back of his throat. "Of course not! At a young age the human psyche is very easily swayed, by sorting them by trait you are telling them how they should act, who they should associate with, and what their status in society is likely to be. I've read the history of Hogwarts and wizarding Britain, only Slytherin's and a very, VERY select few of the other houses go into politics, most Hufflepuffs get low level Ministry jobs while Gryffindors go into high risk jobs and Ravenclaws go into research. That's half the reason Voldemort was so successful during the war, his followers were essentially controlling the ministry!"

"True, it wasn't always like that you know."

"But it is now, the idea of sorting by trait was formed what, near the founding of the school? That means it hasn't changed for somewhere around a thousand years. Human beings are always changing, always adapting to new circumstances, when rules and social mores don't change with them society stagnates and crumbles; that was how Rome, Greek and many other cultures were destroyed."

"I can't fault your logic, but why don't we get back to the sorting, yes? You certainly are hardworking, and you're friendly enough to be in Hufflepuff, but you're not very trusting."

"Trust is a lot like respect," Harry countered, "it must be earned, trust not earned is trust that would easily be broken or taken for granted."

"Yes, that is true. So, what house should you be in..."

"Just put me where ever, it won't matter in the end."

The hat chuckled, "yes, I see your goals so I know what you plan on doing with the houses...very well. You don't really fit into any of the houses, but if you want to change things you need to be in a position of leadership, people need to see you as someone willing to head the charge for change. That means your only option is..."

The Great Hall was silent throughout the whole ordeal, watching as Harry's normally cool face flashed through a variety of emotions. By the time the first few minutes had passed people began to make muttered whisperings, when the time hit the five minute mark the students began to get annoyed, but it had now passed the fifteen minute mark and everyone was starting to get worried.

A worried Professor McGonagall looked behind her at Albus Dumbledore, who was leaning his seat and watching Harry intently. She turned her attention back to Harry, wondering why this sorting was taking so long. She turned back just as the sorting hat shouted, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Almost immediately cheers and clapping came from the Gryffindor section as Harry hopped off the stool and made his way over to the table, where he was inducted with many claps on the back and people cheering at him. he played a good sport, being courteous enough to shake some hands and nod at some people, right before he sat down and did his best to ignore them.

At the head table Dumbleodre released a large sigh, his plans were still intact.

XoX

A/N: This is in response to Vizard's review since he or she didn't use an actual account. First off, I find the fact that the Harry in canon didn't freak out to be completely out of his character and unrealistic, Rowling created him as a Malnourished, mentally abused, isolated and lonely child, when all of a sudden he is beset by dozens of witches and wizards. If it were me, I would be panicking. Now, the Harry I created reacted that way not because he was more or less mobbed by fans, but because it wasn't something he could predict.



He had no clue it was going to happen and when it did he had no idea how to deal with it, despite his maturity he is still an impressionable 11 year old boy, maybe even more so because he has eidetic memory. I like to consider myself a fairly normal, if slightly egotistical person, and if I was 11 years old again, and what happened to Harry happened to me, I would have freaked out. Anyways, the point I'm trying to make is that I don't think J.K. Rowling really thought about how a child would react to that kind of situation, it was more or less a plot device to get Hagrid to tell Harry why he was famous and introduce the name Voldemort, which in my opinion is a terrible way to write since it means she wasn't thinking things through.

## Chapter 4: Start of the Term

XoX

Harry made his way through the throng of students, finding a good seat in between the bushy haired girl, Hermione, and a boy that looked like he wanted to do nothing more than hide in his shirt called Neville.

"Wotcher," Harry greeted the two as he plopped down.

"H-hello," Neville stuttered in surprise, no doubt surprised that the supposed great Harry Potter was speaking to him.

"Are you really Harry Potter?" asked Hermione in a matter of fact tone of voice. "I know all about you, of course – I got a few extra books. For background reading, and you're in Modern Magical History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century."

Harry shook his head at the girl, it was obvious by just how she spoke that she utterly believed everything the books said. "I suggest you disregard those books, I've read them myself and there complete rubbish. Honestly, how people could ever think a five year old can fight trolls on a near daily basis is beyond me."

Hermione seemed to bristle a bit, like insulting books was the height of blasphemy, but Harry wasn't really bothered by her glare.

The sorting began again and ended with Blaise Zabini being put into Slytherin. With the sorting done, Professor McGonagall rolled up her scroll and took the Sorting Hat away.

Albus Dumbledore had gotten to his feet. He was beaming at the students, his arms opened wide, as if nothing could have pleased him more than to see them all here.

"Welcome!" he said. "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!

"Thank you!"

"Is he right in the head?" asked Harry as he turned to Neville.

"you're talking to me?" Neville said in surprise.

"Well I could be talking to guy ten seats down from you, but I doubt he'd hear," Harry said, rolling his eyes slightly. "Yes, I'm talking to you."

"Oh," Neville seemed to shrink in on himself, it was becoming blatantly obvious this boy had no courage, something he would have to work on if he wanted to survive once he left Hogwarts.

"So what's up with Dumbledore? He's seems to be missing a few marbles."

"Well, a lot of people say he's slightly barmy," Neville said. "My gran thinks he's a bit of nutter."

Harry nodded, wondering how much of that was true and how much of Dumbledore's supposed crazy an act. Looking at Dumbledore he was reminded of a poison dart frog, it was bright and cheery and didn't look dangerous at all. But it contained enough venom to kill ten to twenty men.

He shook the thoughts off and looked down at the dishes in front of him and had to contain his surprise, they were now piled with food. There was a large variety of foods to choose from: roast beef, roast chicken, pork chops and lamb chops, sausages, bacon and steak, boiled potatoes, roast potatoes, fries, Yorkshire pudding, peas, carrots, gravy, ketchup and, for some reason, peppermint humbugs. Harry tried a little bit of everything, the food was good, though not exactly what he liked; he would find some way to get the food he preferred to eat, even if he had to go to the kitchen and make it himself.

"You said your name was Longbottom, right?" commented Harry as he looked around at all the students. His estimation of the houses was right, all the other houses were quite tame compared to the rowdy Gryffindor, the Ravenclaws seemed to be having quiet discussion, the Slytherins were looking at everyone with distrust, and the Hufflepuffs were talking in a friendly but subdued manner. It was very disappointing to see how the sorting made people.

"Er, yeah?" said Neville unsurely.

"You know I read that the Potters and Longbottoms are longstanding allies," Harry looked at him with a lazy half-grin. "My grandfather's journal claimed that your father was a good friend of my father's, so you can consider us allies."

If Harry could get Neville's confidence up it would not only be a boon to the poor boy, but it would help Harry with his overall plan for Hogwarts, maybe even his half-formed plans for the wizarding world.

He stuck out his hand to the stunned Neville, who suddenly began shaking it very enthusiastically.

Desserts appeared when everyone had finished eating dinner, and Harry found a fondness for the treacle tart.

As he ate his dessert Harry found his eyes straying towards the teachers table. Headmaster Dumbledore looked to be in deep conversation with McGonagall, who was gesticulating towards the students, occasionally she would look over at him but turned away when she noticed he was looking. Hagrid was drinking deeply from a cup. And a jittery looking Professor in a ridiculous turban was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin.

A second later the Hook-nosed teacher looked at him and Harry felt pain in his scar. It was more like a pin-prick compared to some of the injuries he had gained over the years, but he could still feel it. A frown crossed his face before he turned away and grabbed another tart.

At last, the desserts too disappeared, and Professor Dumbledore got to his feet again. The hall fell silent.

"Ahem – just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you."

"First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well."

Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins over at the Gryffindor table.

"I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors."

"Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch.

"And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

A few people laughed, but Harry narrowed his eyes. Why was the third-floor corridor forbidden? What would cause someone to die a painful death? And more importantly, why was something that caused painful deaths in a school filled with children? These questions plagued Harry, who had the feeling that there was something about this situation that was not quite right, but for the life of him, could not guess why.

"And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!" cried Dumbledore. Harry noticed that the other teachers' smiles had become fixed.

Dumbledore gave his wand a little flick, as if he was trying to get a fly off the end, and a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted itself, snakelike into words.

"Everyone pick their favorite tune," said Dumbledore, "and off we go!"

What followed next was not a song, nor could it be considered music. Harry would have rather listened to the slow painful screech of some kind of dying animal than the garbage that was being spewed out of the mouths of the kids singing.

Everybody finished the song at different times. At last, only the Weasley twins were left singing along to a very slow funeral march. Dumbledore conducted their last few lines with his wand and when they finished, he was one of those who clapped loudest.

"Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes. "A magic beyond all we do here! And now. Bedtime. Off you trot!"

Harry and the rest of the Gryffindor first years followed Percy through the chattering crowds, out of the Great Hall, and up the marble staircase. As they watched Harry remained alert and took in everything he could, he watched curiously as the people in the paintings moved from portrait to portrait and offered a grin and lazy wave when one of the women that had taken to following their progression called him a cutie.

Percy led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries, and Harry wondered how far they would have to go before they got to their dorms. They climbed up more staircases, many of the students were yawning and dragging their feet, before they came to a sudden stop.

A bundle of walking sticks was floating in midair ahead of them, and as Percy took a step toward them they started throwing themselves at him.

"Peeves," Percy whispered to the first years. "A poltergeist." He raised his voice, "Peeves - show yourself" A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a balloon, answered.

"Do you want me to go to the Bloody Baron." There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark eyes and a wide mouth appeared, floating cross- legged in the air, clutching the walking sticks.

"Oooooooh!" he said, with an evil cackle. "Ickle Firsties! What fun!" He swooped suddenly at them. They all ducked.

"Go away, Peeves, or the Baron'll hear about this, I mean it!" barked Percy.

Peeves stuck out his tongue and vanished, dropping the walking sticks as he did. The sticks would have fallen on Neville's head but Harry's hand shot out and caught them. They heard him zooming away, rattling coats of armor as he passed.

"Thanks," Neville said to Harry.

"No problem," Harry replied.

"You want to watch out for Peeves," said Percy, as they set off again. "The Bloody Baron's the only one who can control him, he won't even listen to us prefects. Here we are."

At the very end of the corridor hung a portrait of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress.

"Password." she said. "Caput Draconis," said Percy, and the portrait swung forward to reveal a round hole in the wall. They all scrambled through it - Neville needed a leg up - and found themselves in the Gryffindor common room, a cozy, round room full of squashy armchairs.

Percy directed the girls through one door to their dormitory and the boys through another. At the top of a spiral staircase - they were obviously in one of the towers - they found their beds at last: five four-posters hung with deep red, velvet curtains. The place could use some work in Harry's estimation, but he felt that with some more items, maybe a desk or something, the place would be better. Their trunks had already been brought up.

Harry opened the fourth compartment of his trunk and took out his owl perch, placing it to the left of his bed. He closed it and then opened up his third compartment and pulled out a book on Transfiguration. Sitting on the bed he made himself comfortable and began to read, absently noting that the others were already asleep. A few hours later, when his eyes began to feel heavy, Harry went to sleep.

XoX

The next morning the sun began to creep in through the curtains, showering Harry's bed in its light. Harry woke up, rather reluctantly and got himself out of bed. He put on a pair of sweatpants, a sleeveless shirt and some trainers before making his way down to the common room and out the door. He used the knowledge he gleaned last night to make his way down to the entrance hall, and on to the campus grounds.

The air was crisp and fresh and Harry enjoyed his morning run, spending it by going around the black lake several times and taking in his new surroundings. He did his standard exercises, push-ups,

sit-ups, balancing exercises and used a tree as a make-shift punching bag.

Then he went through his kata's. Master Wei had always been of the belief that no two fighting styles were ever the same even when people used the same style; this was because no two people were the same and therefore would adapt to a style of fighting differently. For this reason, Harry's sensei didn't teach anyone style of fighting, Muay Thai, Kosho Shorei Ryu Kempo, Jujitsu, Hankido, he had mastered many styles and would teach the one he thought suited a person best. After that it was up to the student to adapt his fighting style into something that was entirely his own.

Harry was slightly different, he didn't use just one style, but a multitude of fighting styles to create something that was unique to him. It was a myriad of Muay Thai's use of using knees and elbows, the grappling techniques of jujitsu and the application of brutal and pin-point striking techniques and counter-attacks of Krav Maga. He had mixed that in with some dance moves he had once seen so he could fully utilize his speed, grace and reflexes to dodge. It was a style his sensei felt was too flashy due to the amount of movement he used, but it suited Harry since he had more endurance than most people.

By the time he had finished his shirt was off, there was a light sheen of sweat covering him, his knuckles, which had been bloody from punching the tree were healed by his magic and like always after a good work out, he was feeling great.

He made his way back to his common room, moving up the staircase, several times he had to change directions when one of the staircases moved and he resolved to explore the castle some more so he wouldn't get lost. He walked through a few corridors, several of the paintings actually greeted him and he returned their greetings with a wave and a smile, absently thinking of seeing if the paintings could keep an ear to the ground for him about the going ons in Hogwarts. From what he had seen yesterday, most of the kids who belonged in wizarding families completely overlooked the portraits, and the muggle born children would in all likelihood do the same once they became accustomed to moving, talking portraits. That meant they would be able to learn things that others couldn't, and would provide an intelligence network that was so integrated into Hogwarts that it would be impossible to get rid of.



Of course, this was all assuming that Dumbledore was not already doing so. Harry had read that the venerated Headmaster was supposed to be the keaneest mind of his time, and was still hailed as the most powerful wizard of the century. Harry had no doubt that the man had likely already considered the benefits of having the portraits report on the activities of the going ons at Hogwarts to him, which would make using them dangerous, since Harry had plans and he didn't know whether or not Dumbledore would approve. Change was often met with resistance after all.

After a nice, long and refreshing shower Harry got dressed in a nice pair of black jeans and a dark blue shirt. He went back into his room to get his robes and smiled when he saw Hedwig on her perch, her intelligent amber eyes staring at him.

"Hello girl," Harry cooed softly, stroking Hedwig's chest. "I wondered when you would get here."

Hedwig gently nipped his finger.

Moving over to his trunk Harry opened the first compartment and grabbed a set of robes, but rather than put them on he placed them on his bed, he would wear them when he needed them. He closed his trunk and then opened the second compartment and pulled out a book on charms. Closing and locking his trunk Harry made his way downstairs in to the common room, sitting down on one of the couches near the fire place and began reading.

"Well now look who's up bright and early," a voice called from behind the couch. Harry turned to see two red heads, identical twins that he knew were the brother of the rude kid Ron Weasley.

"Yes dear brother, it looks like we're in luck," said the one on the left.

"It does indeed, we get to be the first ones to greet Harry Potter."

"Yes, and introduce ourselves to Gryffindors resident celebrity."

Harry looked at the two of them with an expression that was halfway between amused and exasperated as he tried to follow their speech. "I take it you too are related to Ron?" Harry said.

"We are indeed related to little Ronnikens."

"Do you know him?"

"We're only asking because we couldn't help but notice –"

"– that he was glaring at you during the feast."

Harry shrugged. "Really? I hadn't noticed, and I suppose you could say I know him." He gave them both a calculating glance. "After all, he did try and ask me if I remember the night my parents died."

They both winced, and Harry nodded to himself, pleased to see they didn't approve of their little brother's actions.

"Ron never learned how to speak without shoving his foot into his mouth."

"Indeed, our poor brother tends to speak out of line quite often."

"We believe it was because he was dropped on his head several times as a baby."

"Of course, it could be all the pranking products we tested on him."

"In which case it may be our fault he's like that."

They both looked at each other and at the same time, said, "nah!"

They jumped over the couch and sat on either side of Harry. "Now introductions," said the one on the left, "I'm Forge, and this is Gred."

"Or is it George?"

"No, I'm George!"

"Oh right," the one on the left gesture to himself, "I'm Fred and this is George."

"Pleased to meet you," Harry said. "I would tell you who I am, but you appear to already know," he gave them a wry grin.

"Indeed," said Fred with a grin of his own.

"In fact, the entire school knows who you are," added George.

"I figured that," Harry sighed, "they'll likely stare at me like some kind of artifact from a museum."

"Or animal in a zoo," added Fred.

"That's much better," Harry said dryly.

By now people seemed to be waking up and coming down from their dorms. Harry spotted Neville come down and excused himself from the twins who were trying to get him to try some of their products.

"Morning Neville," Harry greeted.

"Morning, Harry," Neville said.

The two of them made their out of the common room and true to his prediction the moment Harry stepped into the more populated areas on his way to the Great Hall, he was immediately stared at.

"Is that him?"

"The one with the pudgy kid?"

"Yeah, did you see his face?"

"Did you see his scar?"

The whispers followed Harry all the way to the Great Hall, people would stop to stare at him, even doubling back to get a second glimpse. Harry had to keep repeating the mantra 'must not punch other students in the face' in his head as his irritation rose.

"Don't people have something better to do then stare at me," Harry wondered out loud, loud enough for the people near him to hear and turn away, embarrassed. "That's better," he sat down and started piling scrambled eggs on his plate and grabbed several pieces of toast.

Conversation was a little stilted from both him and Neville eating, but most of it focused on what they were hoping to learn from the

classes and what the teachers would be like. A few moments later Hermione walked in and Harry invited her to sit with them, he listened to her as she began speaking about their classes and how excited she was to learn. Harry listened a bit, offered some commentary, he wondered how the hat hadn't sorted her into Ravenclaw, what with its desire to sort by traits, but was somewhat glad it didn't, Gryffindor needed some brains to go with their bronze.

"Could you two excuse me for a minute?" said Harry as he stood up and walked over to the entrance. Hannah and Susan had just entered and were about to make their way to the Hufflepuff table when Harry greeted them, "wotcher, Hannah, Susan."

"Morning Harry!" Hannah replied enthusiastically.

"Good morning," Susan added, giving him a shy smile.

"Would you two like to join me, Neville and Hermione for breakfast?" he asked, gesture over to where the two aforementioned people were watching him.

"You mean at the Gryffindor table?" asked Susan with a soft squeak.

"Yes."

"Is that allowed?" asked Hannah.

Harry shrugged, "Does it matter?"

"But what if it's against the rules?"

"Who cares?" said Harry, "it's not like they can reprimand you for sitting with a friend from another house can they? And if they try, just claim ignorance."

Susan looked both eager and unsure at the same time, "I don't know..."

Harry rolled his eyes and grabbed the two girls by the hand. "I won't be taking no for an answer," he replied as he began to pull them along with him, "now come on."

Both of them sat down on the opposite side of Hermione and Neville, Harry sitting next to Susan. "So I don't know if any of you know each other, Neville, Hermione, this is Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott. Hannah, Susan, Neville and Hermione."

"Hello Hermione, Neville," Susan greeted shyly while Hannah, having gotten over her surprise at getting bodily dragged to another house's table chirped out a cheerful hello.

Hermione said a quick hello, and Neville greeted them both, "H-hello, Hannah. Susan, it's good to see you again."

"So you two know each other?" asked Harry curiously.

Susan nodded her head, "my auntie is the Head for the D.M.L.E. and often works with the Wizengamot."

"And my gran is a member of the Wizengamot," added Neville, "our relatives run in the same social circles and we've met each other at some of the parties they took us to."

"I suppose I should have known that," Harry muttered, more to himself than the others. "There doesn't seem to be a lot of pureblood families, so it would make sense for you two to know each other." He would have to study up on wizarding families more, he had only read the first five chapters of the book he had gotten. Their breakfast was eventually interrupted by Professors McGonagall and Sprout, who came over to hand out schedules.

"We are pleased to see you five are getting into the spirit of inter-house cooperation," Professor Sprout said, smiling widely at the group.

"Ten points to each of you," added Professor McGonagall. Harry gave Susan and Hannah an 'I told you so' grin.

As they walked off Harry compared his schedule to that of Susan's and Hannah's. "It looks like we have Astronomy, Transfiguration and Herbology together," he frowned, "of course, we have Astronomy with everyone."

"Classes don't start for another week," Hermione said as she looked at her own schedule.

"That's because its Thursday, they likely don't want us to be ahead in the classes we have today and tomorrow," replied Harry. "That's fine with me, personally I would like to do some exploring before we start school. Would any of you like to join me after breakfast?"

"I'm definitely in," Hannah said with a cheerful smile.

"I would," Susan said quietly. The others nodded their affirmative and after breakfast all left to explore the castle.

XoX

The days before class started passed by quickly enough. Harry spent that time exploring the school, usually he was with Neville, Susan and Hannah, though Hermione joined occasionally. The bookish girl seemed to prefer spending every waking hour in the library instead of outside or exploring some of the less used corridors.

During his explorations Harry managed to find the kitchens, which was staffed by weird little creatures with large eyes and floppy ears called House elves. After conversing with the little creatures, all of whom seemed surprised he was speaking with them so civilly, he managed to convince them to make certain foods for him and gave them the recipes for them. Everyone who had seen what he ate had been surprised that he got something different, some of the muggle-born's had gotten jealous when Harry had had a pepperoni pizza made for him during dinner one evening.

What had really been interesting was when he let his new pure-blood friends Hannah, Susan and Neville try his food, particularly the pizza. All of them reacted in the most comical fashion before proclaiming it as the greatest food they had ever eaten, and wondered why Hogwart's regular food did not have it on the menu.

At first the other students had been very surprised when Harry and the other Gryffindors would sit at the Hufflepuff table; or Susan and Hannah would sit with the Gryffindors, but by Saturday most people were able to shrug it off and their only worry were those who continued to stare at Harry like some sort of oddity.

The teachers had seemed rather pleased with this development as well, especially when it led to a few other students following their example, mostly just some Hufflepuffs who had friends in other classes, but the Weasley twins seemed to use this as an opportunity to discreetly hand out their products, when the teachers weren't looking of course.

The only other problems Harry had were Ron, who continued to glare at him jealously, though he was nothing more than an irritant at best.

There had also been several unused classrooms that Harry felt were perfect for practicing his magic. They were fairly dirty from disuse and all of the desks and tables would need to be moved so he could have space, but with a little work he felt they would be ready by the time classes started.

Other than that Harry had spent his time exercising or in the library with Hermione, who seemed ecstatic that someone else liked reading almost as much as she did. It was during that time that Harry had found a very interesting subject and acquired a goal for his self-study.

An Animagus (pl. Animagi) is a witch or wizard who can morph him or herself into a specific animal at will. It is a learned, rather than hereditary, skill, unlike those of a Metamorphmagus.

Only very powerful and skilled wizards are able to become Animagi. The process of becoming an Animagus is long and arduous, and has the potential to backfire and cause the transformation to go horribly wrong. Once the initial training is over, an Animagus can change at will at any time, with or without a wand.

Animagi can only take on the form of one specific animal. This animal form is not chosen by the wizard, but determined by their personality and inner traits. Thus, one's Animagus form is a reflection of one's inner nature. It is unknown whether Animagi can take the form of a more "magical" creature.

Each Animagus bears an identifying mark on their animal form that is caused by something on their human body. This may be a physical trait like dental structure, or an acquired trait such as glasses.

In addition, an Animagus will appear to lose their clothing upon morphing. The clothing will reappear upon re-establishing the human form. What physically happens to the clothing is unknown. A strong possibility, however, is that the clothing is enchanted beforehand, and will morph/disappear with the person as they do so.

The difference between mere Transfiguration and the Animagus transformation ability is that an Animagus can change into an animal whenever they want, without a wand or an incantation. Being an Animagus is an ability, and Transfiguring requires a spell. An Animagus still thinks as a human does when they are in their animal form. However, an Animagus's feelings are not as complex when they are in their animal form.

An Animagus also has the ability to communicate with normal animals. There seems to be a clear understanding of want and need in this communication ability, but the full extent and quality of it is unknown.

The book he was reading, called Unusual and Rare Abilities and Skills did not go into how one became an animagus and none of the other books he looked in had either, meaning he would likely have to look either in the restricted section, or Diagon Alley. He fervently hoped it was the former because he would not be able to go to Diagon Alley during the school year, and the goal he had set for himself was to become an animagus before the end of the year.

Thankfully he had been able to find the potion he wanted to find out what his animal would be in an advanced potions book and figured he could work on that until a book that told him how to complete the transformation.

"Hermione," Harry said, getting the attention of the girl he was sitting next to. "I'm going to head out, I'll see you later."

"Ok, Harry," Hermione said pleasantly, if a tad distractedly. "See you."

Harry made his way out of the library and was making his way back towards his dorm so he could at least know if he had the correct potions ingredients for the animagus potion. As he was about to walk up a flight of stairs a voice from above shouted, "watch out!"



Harry looked up and it was only his martial arts training that allowed him to react to the falling body, sidestepping the person who had tumbled down the stairs before he wrapped his arms around that persons waist to ensure they didn't break their back hitting the floor.

The person who had fallen, an older girl, sixth or seventh year by judging by her more mature figure, with a heart shaped face and oddly enough, pink hair, had her eyes closed as if bracing herself for the crash. When she realized she had in fact, not fallen on her backside, or any other side, she opened her eyes and found them staring into Harry's grinning face.

"Er, thanks for that," she replied a little embarrassedly.

"No problem," Harry replied as he let her stand. Once she was standing he noted that she was a little on the short side, or it could just be he was taller than most kids his age. Despite being only eleven Harry was around five foot even in height, Tonks, looked to be around only a head taller.

"You've got some quick reflexes and are surprisingly strong for a first year," she said as she eyed him appraisingly.

Harry gave a small grin and shrugged, "comes with my training."

"Hey – wait a tick," she said as her eyes widened. "You're Harry Potter!"

"Why yes, yes I am," he had gotten use enough to the staring and what not within the past week that now everything was just amusing. "Which begs the question, did you run into me because you're clumsy, or were you hoping I would sweep you off your feet?"

The girl opened her mouth to respond before she blinked. She stared at him unsurely for several seconds before saying, "are you flirting with me?"

Now it was Harry's turn to blink. "I don't think so," he replied slowly, while his mind was a bit more mature thanks to his photographic memory and being forced to more or less raise himself, he had never really thought about girls beyond things like 'oh, she's pretty' and the like. "At least, I'm pretty sure I'm not, too young." He looked

a sheepish a second later, "I just heard something similar in a movie I saw once and the opportunity was so perfect I had to say it. You know what a movie is right?"

"Of course I know what a movie is," the pink-haired girl said as if offended.

"Sorry, it's just no pureblood I've talked to ever knows what a movie is," Harry said in explanation. It had been slightly frustrating when he had occasionally done or said something that could be considered muggle and no one other than Hermione had gotten it.

"Oh," she looked embarrassed for a second before grinning. "Good thing I'm not a pureblood then, my mum is, but my dad's muggle-born. Anyways I'm Tonks," she held out her hand.

"I see, nice to meet you then," Harry kissed the back of her hand, much to Tonks' embarrassment. "Do you have a last name then?"

"That is my last name," Tonks replied, "I don't go by my first name."

"What's your first name?" asked Harry.

"Sorry," Tonks winked at him, "not telling."

"What? That's not fair," Harry felt like pouting but refrained. "You know my first name."

"Yeah, but you probably like, or at least don't dislike your first name," Tonks mumbled.

Harry frowned for a moment but then shrugged her obvious dislike for her name off. "So where were you going in such a hurry that had you falling down the stairs?" he asked instead.

"Oh, that," Tonks looked sheepishly at him as she rubbed the back of her neck. "Haha, well, I wasn't actually going anywhere, just sort of wandering, you know?"

"I do," Harry said sagely, within his mind he concluded that Tonks was just naturally clumsy. "Well, I'll see you later Tonks, I have some things I want to do, but don't be a stranger."

"Same to you!" Tonks replied cheerfully as he began walking up the stairs.

The rest of Harry's time that day was spent looking at his ingredients, making sure he had everything he needed for the potion. He did, thankfully having stalked up on nearly every ingredient he could get his hands on. He would have to hold off on actually brewing the potion until he got some more experience since it was fairly complicated, but figured after a few months of practice he would be ready.

XoX

Classes soon started and the Gryffindors first class of the week was History. Harry, who had always been interested in history was extremely disappointed with this class.

He had been expecting to learn about things like Merlin, the history behind the first wizards to discover magic, ancient battles and dramatic changes to wizarding society. What he got instead was the monosyllabic droning of the ghost, Professor Binns, lecturing straight from the book, which Harry had already finished reading the past week.

Harry had decided then and there that he could use the class time more productively by working on other homework assignments or his self-study, it wasn't like the teacher told him anything he didn't already know.

Thankfully, the next class was very interesting, he had transfiguration with the Hufflepuffs. When Harry got there with his two friends he saw that Susan and Hannah were already there, along with the other Hufflepuffs. The two girls seemed to have saved them some seats and Harry and Neville got to sit on Susan right while Hermione was on Hannah's left.

As soon as class started Harry immediately knew that Professor McGonagall was one of those no nonsense teachers.

"Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts," she said. "Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned." Then she changed her desk into a pig and back again. They were all

very impressed and couldn't wait to get started, but soon realized they weren't going to be changing the furniture into animals for a long time.

Harry listened intently to the woman as she lectured, unlike the other students who were using quills and parchment to write, he used a notebook and a pen, drawing several curious stares, including one from McGonagall herself. No one said anything however and Harry was able to take notes in peace, carefully listening to his teacher and cross referencing it with what he had read in other books and what he was capable of wandlessly. After the lecture they were all given a match and had to transfigure it into a needle.

The only thing Harry wondered about was how much he should show, he had no intention of doing bad just so people would underestimate him, but rather, wondering if he should maybe look like he struggled a bit before getting it down. After a minute of simply staring at his match Harry just decided not to waste time hiding his abilities besides the obvious wandless one, most people expected him to be the next coming of Merlin anyway so it didn't really matter.

With a near lazy wave of his wand Harry transfigured the match into a perfect needle, on his first try, another wave and it was a match again. He resisted giving a bored sigh, especially when he noticed everyone else was struggling with the task. He did this several more times, managing to catch the notice of the four surrounding him.

"How are you doing that?" demanded Hannah with a cross between wanting to look at him in awe and wanting to pout.

"Hmm?" Harry looked up from where he was staring to look at Hannah. "Do what?"

"That!" Hannah looked frustrated, "how are doing the spell so easily?"

The other three also looked interested, along with the entire class who had noticed him doing the spell like he had been born with a wand in his hand. Hermione looked particularly interested, though she also seemed disgruntled that she didn't get the spell first.

"Transfiguration is all about focus and visualization, you can't just wave your wand, say an incantation and expect the match to turn

into a needle," Harry began. "You have to picture it changing in your mind, literally visualize the change happening as you cast the spell. Try it first by taking the spell in steps."

"Steps?" asked Neville, who had the least amount of success with his transfiguration.

"Yes," Harry said. "What needs to change? What's different about the match from the needle? You have the thickness, the point and eye of the needle and the material. It doesn't matter which order you make the changes, but when I cast the spell I change the thickness first, then the material, then I'll transform the head of the match into the needles eye and finally the other end into the point. By following it in smaller steps you don't have to try and focus on the whole item changing at once and allows you to get each point right."

It had taken him a long time to work this out, he had first discovered transfiguration when he accidentally turned a baseball Duddley had thrown at him into a stiropore floaty toy. He eventually managed to reverse engineer his steps and came up with this method of practice, using his furniture as the test subjects.

"That is a very impressive display of knowledge and magic, Mr. Potter," a voice came from in front. It was then Harry realized that he was the attention of everyone in the room, some looking at him in awe, others, namely Ron, in jealousy. "Twenty points for Gryffindor, ten for getting the spell right, and another ten for the enlightening knowledgeable explanation," Professor McGonagall said, giving him a rare smile.

"Thank you, ma'am," Harry said with a small nod, he wondered if he might have gone a bit overboard with his explanation. He didn't want to sound arrogant.

However, it seemed most people didn't think that way, and Harry spent the rest of class helping a few of the other students. No one else had been able to finish the transfiguration but most had managed to get the thickness and material down, while Hermione had managed to make the eye.

After Transfiguration was lunch, and then Herbology, which they had three times a week in the greenhouses behind the castle. The class was taught by Professor Sprout and they learned how to take care

of all kinds of strange plants and fungi, and found out what they were used for. It was all just theory right now, Harry figured most of the year it would be since they did not let first years deal with the more dangerous plants.

One of the classes he had been looking forward to had been Defense Against the Dark Arts, Harry was sorely disappointed with this class, Professor Quirrell's lessons were a complete crock. His classroom smelled strongly of garlic, which everyone said was to ward off a vampire he'd met in Romania and was afraid would be coming back to get him one of these days. His turban, he told them, had been given to him by an African prince as a thank-you for getting rid of a troublesome zombie, but they weren't sure they believed this story.

For one thing, when Seamus Finnigan asked eagerly to hear how Quirrell had fought off the zombie, Quirrell went pink and started talking about the weather; for another, they had noticed that a funny smell hung around the turban, and the Weasley twins insisted that it was stuffed full of garlic as well, so that Quirrell was protected wherever he went.

The only thing that bothered him in this class was the itching on his scar, and a small prickle he remembered from when the sorting hat had tried to access his mind. It had only happened once, and was so fast that it was only because of Harry's memory that he could recognize what was happening, even then, he couldn't figure out who was doing it since Harry had found a book in the library that said entering a mind required eye contact, and this was only done when the teachers back was turned.

He promised himself to be more careful in that class from now on as the lessons continued.

XoX

"Come along class," said Professor Sinistra, a very beautiful dark skinned teacher who looked to be in her early twenties. Of course it was hard to judge a witch or wizard since they lived longer and some people who looked only twenty could easily be in their forties, but Harry figured it was safer to think of her as young.

"I want you all to finish setting up your telescopes, then begin finding the stars in your list on the map."

Harry finished setting up his telescope with a grin, he may not have any true interest in Astronomy but he had been waiting for the opportunity to actually use the telescope he had bought.

"Harry, what do you think your doing!" Hermione asked with a loud screech.

Winching a bit, he turned to her. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"That Telescope!" Hermione said with something of a growl. "That's a muggle telescope!"

"Yes, yes it is, is that a problem?" asked Harry.

"Yes, there is!" she put her hands on her hips, "you were supposed to get your telescope from Diagon Alley!"

"Um, no we weren't," Harry said, defending his position. "The list just said we needed a telescope, not where to get one. Besides, the telescopes at Diagon Alley were crappy sixth century mirror telescopes."

"But...but..." Hermione now looked like she was close to tears and Harry realized she was jealous.

"Look, if you want you can use my telescope too, ok?" it didn't really seem to appease her but at least she nodded.

"Is there a problem here?" asked Professor Sinistra who had walked up when she heard Hermione yelling.

"Not at all, Professor," Harry replied easily. "Just a little mix up about where to buy a telescope."

"I see," Professor Sinistra eyed his telescope with a calculating look. "I've never seen a telescope like this before."

"It's a muggle telescope," Harry said with a shrug. "it's a Cassegrain model, it's not as good as some of the ones I could have bought but it was the best one I found that doesn't require electricity." He looked

at her still staring at the telescope and offered, "do you want to look through it Professor?"

"Can I?" she asked, not even seeing his nod as she moved up and bent down to look through the scope. She completely forgot that Harry was right behind her, so when she bent down he had what to the older students would have been a prime view of her derriere, but to Harry just caused him to blush fiercely and move to the side.

"Amazing!" the dark skinned beauty gasped. "Everything is so clear, I can see constellations I've never even knew existed before!"

"Would you like me to keep it in the astronomy tower?" offered Harry. Professor Sinistra turned and looked at him curiously and he added, "so you can look through it whenever you want? I only use it occasionally so it would just be collecting dust otherwise."

She gave him an appreciative smile and replied, "I would really like that. I've never seen a muggle telescope before but they appear to be much better than any of the ones I've ever looked through before." She then went back to looking through the telescope.

Harry looked amused for a moment and waited for her to finish whatever she was looking for, but when the five minute mark past realized she might have actually forgotten he was even there. He coughed in his hand to get her attention.

"Yes?" she asked.

"Um, you do know I still need that to complete my assignment for tonight, right?" asked Harry.

Professor Sinistra blinked at him until she remembered she had been using his telescope. "Right, sorry," she blushed and moved away.

Harry grinned and did his best to hold in a chuckle, getting a teacher to blush was rather amusing, and as he looked through the telescope and began mapping out the stars, he wondered if he would be able to accomplish such a feat again.

XoX



Ok, for posterities sake I need to say this, I don't want anyone thinking about the pairings right now. There will not be any real romance until Harry starts his third year. While I may add some cute fluffy moments and mild teasing, and while some girls may be interested in Harry that way (they do mature faster than boys after all), Harry will not be interested in girls in a romantic sense for some time to come. So please do not think, or ask about who is going to be paired with Harry.

## Chapter 5: A Potions Professor with a Grudge

XoX

Friday morning came and Harry, Hermione and Neville were at the Hufflepuff table today for breakfast. Some of the teachers, who decided to eat with the students, looked over at the group with smiles, pleased to see people who were willing to promote inter-house unity.

"So what classes do you guys have today?" asked Hannah.

"Double potions with the Slytherins," replied Harry as he ate some of the fruit slices that he had placed in his oatmeal.

"I've heard that the potions teacher, Professor Snape always favors the Slytherins because he's their head of house," said Neville.

"A professor wouldn't act biased in class," Hermione said, looking scandalized at the mere thought of a teacher showing favoritism. Harry had learned fairly quickly that she idolized teachers beyond what was reasonable and felt they could do no wrong. He knew that it would be something she would need to work on, no one was infallible.

"I don't know," Susan began, blushing a bit when Hermione turned the same slightly scowling face on her. "Neville may be right, I was in his class yesterday and he wasn't very pleasant."

"I'm actually looking forward to this class," Harry said. He was hoping that the teacher may be able to help him gain the necessary experience to create the animagus potion.

Just then, the mail arrived. Harry had gotten used to this by now, but it had given him a bit of a shock on the first morning, when about a hundred owls had suddenly streamed into the Great Hall during breakfast, circling the tables until they saw their owners, and dropping letters and packages onto their laps.

Hedwig hadn't brought Harry anything so far. She sometimes flew in to nibble his ear and have a bit of toast before going off to sleep in his room where she had taken residence. This morning, however, she fluttered down between the marmalade and the sugar bowl and

dropped a note next to the bowl Harry was using for his oatmeal. Harry tore it open at once. It said, in a very untidy scrawl:

Dear Harry,

I know you get Friday afternoons off, so would you like to come and have a cup of tea with me around three? I want to hear all about your first week. Send us an answer back with Hedwig.

Hagrid

"Who's the letter from?" asked Neville as he leaned over.

"Hagrid," Harry said with a thoughtful look, absently wondering why Hagrid would invite him to tea.

"Isn't that the really big man who escorted us to Hogwarts?" asked Hannah curiously.

"He is," Harry said, "and I think he's so large because he has some giants blood in him."

"Really?" asked Hermione, who sounded interested in knowing that one of the teachers, or at least staff, might not be considered all human.

"Yeah, it's the only explanation I can think of for how big he is."

"So...are you going to meet him?" asked Hannah.

"I don't know," Harry frowned, he set the letter down as a thoughtful look crossed his face. "I can't think of any reason not to, other than the fact that I've never talked to him before and I don't even know him."

"I think it might be interesting," said Hermione.

"I suppose I can go," he said, before looking at the other's. "Would you all like to go with me?"

Susan and Hannah looked at each other before Hannah shrugged and answered for them, "we have class at that time, unfortunately."

Harry nodded, he had seen their schedules. "What about you Neville? Hermione?"

"Sure, I'll go with you," Neville said.

"Maybe next time," Hermione answered, "there's a book I want to get from the library today, I was told that it would be returned some time today so I want to make sure I get it before anyone else."

"You spend more time with books than you do with us," Harry teased his bushy haired friend. "I almost feel cheated, coming in second place after a book." Hermione flushed bright red while Hannah giggled and Susan and Neville both gave small smiles.

Breakfast came to an end and Hannah and Susan said goodbye while the three Gryffindors made their way to the potions class room.

Potions lessons took place down in one of the dungeons. It was colder there than up in the main castle, and would have been quite creepy enough without the pickled animals floating in glass jars all around the walls.

Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the roll call, and like Flitwick, he paused at Harry's name. Though Harry could immediately tell this man was anything but excited to have him in class, unlike the short charms teacher.

"Ah, Yes," he said softly, "Harry Potter. Our new – celebrity." Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered behind their hands. Snape finished calling the names and looked up at the class.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion making," he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but they caught every word – like Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a class silent without effort. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death – if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach." More silence followed this little speech. Harry and Neville exchanged looks with raised

eyebrows. Hermione Granger was on the edge of her seat and looked desperate to start proving that she wasn't a dunderhead.

"Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood." Hermione's hand shot into the air, but was ignored by Snape and Harry.

"You'd get a powerful sleeping potion called Draught of the Living Death, because the person seems like their dead after they drink it," Harry answered. He watched as Snape's black eyes blinked at him, the only sign he was surprised by Harry's knowledge.

"Well, I guess even an idiot such as yourself can get lucky every now and then," he seemed to regain his balanced and sneered at Harry. "Let's try again. Potter, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar." Hermione stretched her hand as high into the air as it would go without her leaving her seat.

Harry's frown deepened, "in the stomach of a goat, sir."

Snape's mouth worked for several moments, opening and closing as if he had lost his voice. Finally, he said, "What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane." At this, Hermione stood up, her hand stretching toward the dungeon ceiling.

"There is no difference, sir, it's the same plant," replied Harry. "It's also known as aconite by muggle botanists and is one of the key ingredients in wolfsbane potion, a potion that is supposed to help werewolves during their transformations."

Snape's eyes stared at Harry, and he was shocked to see rage behind the Professors eyes. He had no clue what the man was thinking, but it was clear that this man, whoever he was, hated him.

"Ten points from Gryffindor, for cheating," Snape sneered.

Many of the Gryffindors looked shocked and angry at the unjust points taken; Harry had to restrain himself from doing something he would regret, chanting the mantra that it was against his ethics to pound greasy haired professors into the ground for reasons as petty as revenge. Though just because he wasn't going too actually resort to violence against the man didn't mean he wouldn't think it.

"And why exactly do you think I'm cheating professor?" asked Harry in what he hoped was a polite tone, when all he really wanted to do was break the git's nose with a well placed punch.

"None of that information is first year knowledge -"

"Than why did you ask me?" interrupted Harry, eliciting a small string of sniggers from some of the Gryffindors. "If its not first year knowledge wouldn't asking a first year be an exercise in futility, since no first year could reasonably answer it. Which would also mean that I had no clue you would ask those questions, therefore I couldn't possibly be cheating, since I didn't even know I would have to answer those questions in the first place I couldn't have possibly studied those specific questions."

"Another twenty points for you lip, Mr. Potter," Snape said, his eyes glaring into Harry's. Said boy resisted the urge to snarl at the man, instead taking a calming breath and sitting down before he got into more trouble.

"Well. Why aren't you all copying that down?" There was a sudden rummaging for quills and parchment. Harry did his best not to glare at the man as he began writing.

Things didn't improve for the Gryffindors as the Potions lesson continued. Snape put them all into pairs and set them to mixing up a simple potion to cure boils. He swept around in his long black cloak, watching them weigh dried nettles and crush snake fangs, criticizing almost everyone except Malfoy, whom he seemed to like. He was just telling everyone to look at the perfect way Malfoy had stewed his horned slugs when clouds of acid green smoke and a loud hissing filled the dungeon. Ron had somehow managed to melt Seamus's cauldron into a twisted blob, and their potion was seeping across the stone floor, burning holes in people's shoes. Within seconds, the whole class was standing on their stools while Ron, who had been drenched in the potion when the cauldron collapsed, moaned in pain as angry red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.

"Idiot boy!" snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. "I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire." Ron whimpered as boils started to pop up all over his nose.

"Take him up to the hospital wing," Snape spat at Seamus. Then he rounded on Harry and Neville, who had been working next to Ron.

"You – Potter – why didn't you tell him not to add the quills. Thought he'd make you look good if he got it wrong, did you. That's another point you've lost for Gryffindor." This was so unfair that Harry was very, very tempted to forget his sensei's lessons about only using violence for self-defense and the defense of others and smash his elbow into the greasy git's nose. Somehow, somehow he managed to hold his tongue, and fists, by closing his eyes and slowing his breathing.

He and Neville began working again, Harry had Neville cut the ingredients and made sure to supervise while he added them in and stirred the potion. They used Harry's potions book, which by now was filled with notes that he had scrawled on the side about the potion they were making.

"What's this?" asked Snape as he came around and saw the potions book, picking it up and looking through it.

"It's my potions book, sir," Harry said, struggling with the desire not to just rip it out of his hand. "During the summer potions was the only form of magic I was able to practice due to the under-age secrecy laws. I noticed that by doing certain instructions differently, like crushing the newt eggs instead of cutting them, or stirring the potion counterclockwise and adding in two clockwise turns every sixty seconds, makes the potion faster and better."

Professor Snape, who had been flipping through the book and taking in all the notes Harry had added, shut it and stared at him with an unfathomable look. For several seconds this continued until, rather abruptly, Snape turned and stalked off towards another pair of students, leaving Harry and Neville confused. After class, every handed in their potions, Harry's and Neville's had turned out perfect.

Harry had stayed behind when everyone else was leaving, telling them he would catch up with them soon enough. He stood in front of Snape's desk, hands behind his back, waiting for the potions professor to look up.

"What do you want, Potter?" asked Snape, he tried for a sneer but it looked a little less sure than before.

"I wanted to know if I had done anything to offend you, sir?" said Harry. "I couldn't help but notice a lot of animosity coming from you whenever you talked to me, despite the fact that I've never met you before in my life."

"You sound like you think you're special," Snape said, though his tone was snappish there was a bit of a tremor in it. Had it not been for his experience in reading people, Harry might have missed it.

"Not really, just gathering facts from observation," replied Harry. "There was your first comment when you got to my name about my apparent fame, the way you singled me out to answer questions that we both know aren't until the fourth year curriculum, at least. Then how you took off points, automatically assuming I had cheated, and another one for my 'lip' when all I was doing was asking why you thought I was cheating and defending myself, and the last point for not correcting Ron on his potion, even though I wasn't paying any attention to him since I had been focusing on my own brewing."

Harry looked into Snape's eyes and finally saw surprise appear in the man's features. "You did not do that to anyone else, sir, just me. So I know that you hate me for some reason. I sincerely hope, that whatever it is can be overcome."

He then spun on his heel and made his way to the door, pausing only for a moment to look back and toss a parting comment. "Oh, and if I catch you in my mind again, I'll report to professor McGonagall that you're illegally using legilimency on her students."

The door closed behind Harry as he left a stunned potions professor behind.

Harry made his way to the Great Hall for lunch, where he found the others already with Susan and Hannah at the Gryffindor table.

"We heard about potions," Hannah said as Harry sat down next to her. "I can't believe that stupid professor was that horrible; I mean, he was bad in our class, but it sounds like he did some really unjustified things to you."



"He hates me," Harry said with a frown.

"You can't mean that, Harry," Hermione said in a small voice, her unshakable faith in teachers slightly shaken at Snape's unfair attitude. "He just met you, there's no way he could hate you."

"I know he just met me, Hermione," said Harry, coming out a little more snappish than usual. He sighed and closed his eyes, "sorry, I didn't mean to get angry, but I know he hates me, I recognized the look in his eyes. I don't know why, but Snape hates me for some reason."

"Professor Snape, Harry," Hermione corrected.

"No, Snape, until that man gets his act together I am not going to call him a professor," replied Harry, ignoring the bushy haired witch's counter rebuttal to his decisions. He turned to Susan, "so how were your classes?"

"It was good," Susan said, looking at Hermione before beginning a conversation with Harry. Eventually Hermione stopped when she realized he wasn't going to listen to her. As he spoke with Susan, Harry couldn't help but replay the memories of his time in the potions class, and wonder about the possible reasons for Snape's mistreatment and hatred of him.

XoX

At five to three Harry and Neville left the castle and made their way across the grounds. Hagrid lived in a small wooden house on the edge of the forbidden forest. A crossbow and a pair of galoshes were outside the front door.

When Harry knocked they heard a frantic scrabbling from inside and several booming barks. Then Hagrid's voice rang out, saying, "Back, Fang – back." Hagrid's big, hairy face appeared in the crack as he pulled the door open.

"Hang on," he said. "Back, Fang." He let them in, struggling to keep a hold on the collar of an enormous black boar-hound.

There was only one room inside. Hams and pheasants were hanging from the ceiling, a copper kettle was boiling on the open fire, and in the corner stood a massive bed with a patchwork quilt over it.

"Make yerselves at home," said Hagrid, letting go of Fang, who bounded straight at Neville and started licking his ears. Like Hagrid, Fang was clearly not as fierce as he looked.

Hagrid sat down after pouring some boiling water into a large teapot and placing some rock cakes on a plate. "So," he said, "ow was yer first day?"

"Um, it was good," said Harry, frowning for a second. "I'm sorry to ask, but how do you know me?"

"Oh, sorry, forgot ter tell yeh," Hagrid said, looking embarrassed. "I saw yeh once when yeh we're nothing but a babe. 'course, that was a long time ago."

Harry frowned, he had no recollection of having ever met Hagrid, and that was impossible unless they had never met. Or... "Was I asleep?" he asked.

"What? Hmm...now that I think about it, yah yeh we're," said Hagrid, looking at him in a way that let Harry know the man was questioning why he would ask such a question. Thankfully, the look was gone before too long and the jovial expression returned to the giant's face. "It was right after yer parents we're...well, you know. Anyways, I had gotten there and pulled yeh out of the house, yeh we're already asleep. Professor Dumbledore said it was from magical exhaustion it was, good man, Dumbledore."

"I see," ok, so that made sense, he had likely been so tired that he slept through whatever had happened after his parents' death. He hadn't remembered how he got to the Dursleys either so the reason he was just given were sound.

"I take it you knew my parents then?" asked Harry.

"'Course I did," Hagrid said jovially. "Lily n' James were great people they were, great people. You look just like yer father y'know, 'cept yer eyes, yeh got Lily's eyes." He looked over at Neville, "and your Longbot'tom, right?"

"Y-yes, sir," Neville stuttered a bit.

"I knew yer parents too," Hagrid said, "it was a sad day when they were attacked, great people they were."

They talked for a while, Hagrid told the two a bit about their parents. Harry determined that the friendly giant was a good person, if a tad simplistic.

While listening Harry picked up a piece of paper that was lying on the table under the tea cozy. It was a cutting from the Daily Prophet:

### GRINGOTTS BREAK-IN LATEST!

Investigations continue into the break-in at Gringotts on 31 July, widely believed to be the work of Dark wizards or witches unknown.

Gringotts goblins today insisted that nothing had been taken. The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied the same day.

"But we're not telling you what was in there, so keep your noses out if you know what's good for you," said a Gringotts spokesgoblin this afternoon.

"This is interesting," said Harry, drawing attention to himself. "Someone was stupid enough to break into Gringotts."

"I heard about that," Neville said, "it was big news a while ago."

"Really?" Harry scanned the text, apparently the vault that was searched had in fact been emptied earlier that same day. "Well it says nothings been taken, but they didn't catch the culprit either. Whoever it is must be good, I heard Gringotts has some of the best wards and defenses protecting their vaults." He looked over at Hagrid, "do you know anything about this?"

Harry frowned when Hagrid didn't meet his eyes. He and Neville left a little while later, both were fairly quiet. Neville because he sensed that Harry didn't want to talk, and Harry because he was thinking hard on what he had learned and observed.

Something about this particular situation struck him as off; maybe he was just being paranoid, but with Dumbledore's warning at the start of term feast and now Hagrid, who had a very simple thought process, just happened to have a newspaper that was open to the page about a break in at Gringotts was far too suspicious for him. He may have to do some investigating to find out what was going on.

XoX

It was a few days later and Harry, Neville and Hermione were going to go with the rest of the Gryffindors to their first flying lesson after lunch. "So you can't give me any tips, Nev?" asked Harry, who was rather excited to try out something new. Well, sort of new, Harry remembered the few times he had flown the toy broom Sirius had gotten for him, but he had never flown a real broom before.

"Sorry," Neville apologized, "but I don't really know much about riding a broom, I've never done it before."

"No need to apologize," said Harry. "I doubt half of the people with us really know how to fly," he grinned, "Malfoy's been bragging ever since we were told about these lessons, but I've learned through experience that he's all bark and no bite."

Malfoy had been bragging about his flying skills quite a bit, every chance he got, actually. He complained loudly about first years never getting on the house Quidditch teams and told long, boastful stories that always seemed to end with him narrowly escaping Muggles in helicopters. He wasn't the only one, though: the way Seamus Finnigan told it, he'd spent most of his childhood zooming around the countryside on his broomstick.

Everyone from wizarding families talked about Quidditch constantly. Ron had already had a big argument with Dean Thomas, who shared their dormitory, about football. Harry had done his best to ignore that particular argument, but then again, he had done his best to ignore Ron, who had used every chance he had to try and brag to him as a means to impress him, or insult him when the bragging failed.

Neville had never been on a broomstick in his life, because his grandmother had never let him near one. Privately, and honestly, Harry felt she'd had a good reason for this, because Neville

managed to have an extraordinary number of accidents even with both feet on the ground.

Hermione Granger was almost as nervous about flying as Neville was. This was something you couldn't learn by heart out of a book – not that she hadn't tried. At breakfast on Thursday she bored them all with flying tips she'd gotten out of a library book called Quidditch Through the Ages. Neville was hanging on to her every word, desperate for anything that might help him hang on to his broomstick later, but everybody else was very pleased when Hermione's lecture was interrupted by the arrival of the mail.

Harry hadn't had a single letter since Hagrid's note, something that Malfoy had been quick to notice, of course. Malfoy's eagle owl was always bringing him packages of sweets from home, which he opened gloatingly at the Slytherin table. Not that the raven haired youth particularly cared, or even paid attention to the boy, something that burned the Scion of the Malfoy families pride something fierce.

A barn owl brought Neville a small package from his grandmother. He opened it excitedly and showed them a glass ball the size of a large marble, which seemed to be full of white smoke.

"Hey, isn't that a rememberall, Neville?" asked Hannah.

"Yeah," Neville said, nodding his head emphatically as he looked at the blond girl. "Gran knows I forget things – this tells you if there's something you've forgotten to do. Look, you hold it tight like this and if it turns red – oh..." His face fell, because the Remembrall had suddenly glowed scarlet, "You've forgotten something..." Neville was trying to remember what he'd forgotten when Draco Malfoy, who was passing the Gryffindor table, snatched the Remembrall out of his hand.

Harry nearly sighed, Malfoy reminded Harry of a mixture of his cousin Dudley and his rat faced friend Piers Polkiss, a terrible combination if there ever was one. Still, having dealt with those two plenty of times in the past, he knew how to deal with people like that.

"You know if you want one of those you could get your own, Malfoy," Harry said as he turned around and looked at the blond boy. "It isn't very nice to steal things, and besides, you said your dad's rich right? I'm sure he could buy one for you."

Malfoy's face turned red as he scowled at Harry. "What makes you think I need or even want one scarface?" that had been another thing, ever since Harry had turned down his offer of friendship Malfoy had gone out of his way to insult and annoy Harry by calling him things like scar-face.

Harry ignored the insult as he had everything else the blond boy had said, something that angered Draco if the way his ears turned scarlet meant anything, and instead adopted a look of puzzlement. "Well I just assumed you grabbed it because you wanted one for yourself," he shrugged. "I mean, why else would you try and take it?"

"Well..." Malfoy looked unsure now, all it would take was one more push.

"If that wasn't why you wanted it than why don't you just hand it over, otherwise professor McGonagall might think your trying to steal it," Harry held out his hand. Malfoy blinked stupidly at him for several seconds before scowling.

"Fine, I don't want it anyways," he tossed it in the air and Harry's hand flashed out, catching it before it could get very far. Malfoy sneered as he, Crabbe and Goyle walked away.

"Here you are Nev," Harry handed the remembrall back.

"Thanks, Harry," Neville said relieved.

"That was brilliant," Hannah added excitedly. "The way you handled Malfoy was pure genius!"

"Why thank you," Harry replied with a grin, "I try."

"I must admit I was rather impressed with your way of solving the situation without violence," came the Scottish accent of Professor McGonagall. The students turned to see the Transfiguration Professor and head of Gryffindor looking at Harry with a small quirk of her lips. Harry figured it was a smile, or as close to one as the stern transfiguration professor was going to get. "Ten points Gryffindor, Mr. Potter," she said before walking off.

Harry looked at the others to see them looking amused and shrugged.

XoX

At three-thirty that afternoon, Harry, Neville, Hermione and the other Gryffindors hurried down the front steps and onto the grounds for their first flying lesson. It was a clear, breezy day, and the grass rippled under their feet as they marched down the sloping lawns toward a smooth, flat lawn on the opposite side of the grounds to the forbidden forest, whose trees were swaying darkly in the distance.

The Slytherins were already there, and so were twenty broomsticks lying in neat lines on the ground. Harry had heard Fred and George Weasley complain about the school brooms, saying that some of them started to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly to the left.

Their teacher, Madam Hooch, arrived. She had short, gray hair, and yellow eyes like a hawk.

"Well, what are you all waiting for." she barked. "Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up." Harry glanced down at his broom. It was old and some of the twigs stuck out at odd angles.

"Stick out your right hand over your broom," called Madam Hooch at the front, "and say 'Up!'"

"UP!" everyone shouted.

Harry's broom jumped into his hand at once, but it was one of the few that did. Hermione Granger's had simply rolled over on the ground, and Neville's hadn't moved at all.

"Hey Nev, hold on a second," Harry said, getting the boy to stop.

"What's wrong, Harry?"

"I think the reason you're not getting the broom to listen is because you're not being clear enough," explained Harry. "Try enunciating in a clear and commanding voice, like..." Harry frowned as he tried to find an analogy that a pureblood would understand. "Just try

imagining your Percy without the Snobbish tone," he said eventually, getting a laugh from all the Gryffindors.

"Up!" shouted Neville, suddenly the broom shot into his hand.

"There yah go!" Harry cheered. After that Hermione, who had been listening tried out his advice, getting the broom to jump into her hand.

"Excellent job, Mr. Potter," said Madame Hooch. "You would make a great teacher, ten points for Gryffindor."

The Gryffindors all smiled at another ten points being earned, while most of the Slytherins scowled.

Madam Hooch then showed them how to mount their brooms without sliding off the end, and walked up and down the rows correcting their grips.

Harry tried hard not to smile when she told Malfoy he'd been doing it wrong for years.

"Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground, hard," said Madam Hooch. "Keep your brooms steady, rise a few feet, and then come straight back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle – three – two –" But Neville, nervous and jumpy and frightened of being left on the ground, pushed off hard before the whistle had touched Madam Hooch's lips.

"Come back, boy!" she shouted, but Neville was rising straight up like a cork shot out of a bottle – twelve feet – twenty feet. Harry saw his scared white face look down at the ground falling away, saw him gasp, slip sideways off the broom and – WHAM – a thud and a nasty crack and Neville lay face down on the grass in a heap. His broomstick was still rising higher and higher, and started to drift lazily toward the forbidden forest and out of sight.

Madam Hooch was bending over Neville, her face as white as his.

"Broken wrist," Harry heard her mutter. "Come on, boy - it's all right, up you get."

She turned to the rest of the class.



"None of you are to move while I take this boy to the hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are or you'll be out of Hogwarts before you can say 'Quidditch.' Come on, dear." Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him.

No sooner were they out of earshot than Malfoy burst into laughter.

"Did you see his face, the great lump?" The other Slytherins joined in, Harry noticed that only Blaise, Tracey and Daphne had not joined in. Blaise looked uninterested in the conversation all together, while Daphne simply kept up with her cold demeanor and Tracey seemed to be on the fence of whether she should laugh or not. Occasionally, he noticed that she would look over at him, though when she saw he had caught her she would look away.

"Shut up, Malfoy," snapped Parvati Patil.

"Ooh, sticking up for Longbottom." said Pansy Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl. "Never thought you'd like fat little crybabies, Parvati."

"Look!" said Malfoy, darting forward and snatching something out of the grass. "It's that stupid thing Longbottom's gran sent him." The Remembrall glittered in the sun as he held it up.

"If it's so stupid why do you keep trying to steal it?" asked Harry. Everyone went quiet as they watched the confrontation. "Really, Malfoy, I thought we've already been through this, if you really want one of those, then just have your daddy buy it for you. He's rich, or so you keep telling everyone."

The Gryffindors all laughed and Malfoy's cheeks burned red.

"I don't want this stupid thing!" he snarled.

"Well you sure have a funny way to let everyone know that," Harry replied with indifference. "I mean, you don't see anyone else just trying to pocket it, now do you?"

"I already told you, I don't want it!" Malfoy shouted.

Harry held out a hand. "Well alright then, just give it here."

Once again an uncertain look crossed Malfoy's face. He looked at the ball, to Harry's hand, then back to the ball. It looked like he was about to give it to Harry when Ron decided to jump in and make things worse.

"Oi! Malfoy, give it to me you stupid sod!"

"No," Malfoy said, bringing his hand back down just as Harry was about to take it from him. "I think I'll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to find – how about – up a tree."

"Give it here!" Harry said firmly, but Malfoy had leapt onto his broomstick and taken off. He hadn't been lying, he could fly well.

Hovering level with the topmost branches of an oak he called, "Come and get it, if you can!"

A growl emanated from Harry's throat as he wordlessly summoned the broom to his hand, getting shocked looks from the crowd both Gryffindor and Slytherin alike, and rocketed off, completely ignoring Hermione's warning. The moment Harry left the ground, he felt an odd euphoria he had only ever felt a few times; the first, was when his dad had taken him up on his broom when he was less than a year old, only to get scolded by Lily. The other was when Sirius had gotten him a toy broom and he had chased around a cat when flying on it. Both those times gave him this feeling, however they also paled in comparison to now.

He pulled his broomstick up a little to take it even higher, and heard screams and gasps of girls back on the ground and an admiring whoop from the boys.

He turned his broomstick sharply to face Malfoy in midair. Malfoy looked stunned.

"I'm only going to give you one warning, and if you don't listen I'm going to make sure you regret it!" Harry said, his eyes actually beginning to crackle and glow as his magic began to respond to his emotions. "Give. Me. the remembrall."

When Malfoy didn't respond Harry leaned forward and grasped the broom tightly in both hands, and it shot toward Malfoy like a javelin.

Malfoy only just got out of the way in time; Harry made a sharp about-face and held the broom steady. A few people below were clapping.

"No Crabbe and Goyle up here to save your neck up here, Malfoy," Harry taunted the boy.

The same thought seemed to have struck Malfoy.

"Catch it if you can, then!" he shouted, and he threw the glass ball high into the air and streaked back toward the ground.

Harry saw, as though in slow motion, the ball rise up in the air and then start to fall. He leaned forward and pointed his broom handle down – next second he was gathering speed in a steep dive, racing the ball – wind whistled in his ears, mingled with the screams of people watching. He absently calculated the distance between him, the remembrall and the ground. fifteen feet, ten feet, five, at two feet Harry stretched out his hand and snatched the small ball with it, pulling hard on the broomstick with the other and leveling out, his feet barely touching the grass.

He then turned, shooting straight at Malfoy, who by now had gotten off his broom and like the rest was gaping at Harry. The blond boy was too shocked by the catch to do anything as Harry grabbed him by the shirt and yanked him off the ground. Draco's girlish screams filled the air as Harry flew over to a statue on the wall, one with a sharp point at the end. Grinning Harry stopped right above it and dropped Malfoy, discreetly using wandless magic to guide the screaming kid so that his robes hooked onto the tip so he was stuck there.

Harry grinned as the students all shouted and cheered, well, all the Gryffindor students anyways. He jumped off his broom and was just about to make a grandstanding bow when –

"HARRY POTTER!" Harry groaned as he turned around to see Professor McGonagall stalking towards him, a very stern frown on her face.

"Never – in all my time at Hogwarts –"

Professor McGonagall was almost speechless with shock, and her glasses flashed furiously, "- how dare you – do you know how reckless that was – and what you did to Mr. Malfoy – "

"It wasn't his fault, Professor –"

"Be quiet, Miss Patil. Potter, follow me, now." Professor McGonagall levitated a screaming Malfoy down before she left with Harry in tow, walking in Professor McGonagall's wake as she strode toward the castle. Professor McGonagall was sweeping along without even looking at him.

Up the front steps, up the marble staircase inside, and still Professor McGonagall didn't say a word to him. She wrenched open doors and marched along corridors with Harry trotting miserably behind her. Maybe she was taking him to Dumbledore. He thought of Hagrid, expelled but allowed to stay on as gamekeeper. Perhaps he could be Hagrid's assistant. His stomach twisted as he imagined it, watching Neville, Hermione, Hannah, Susan and the others becoming wizards, while he stumped around the grounds carrying Hagrid's bag.

He shook his head. It wouldn't come to that. He didn't like the thought, but if he had to, he would use the Boy-Who-Lived card and plead to the Ministry. The thought turned his stomach, but while he was adverse to using his fame, which he in no way earned, he would if he had to.

Professor McGonagall stopped outside a classroom. She opened the door and poked her head inside.

"Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood for a moment."

Wood? thought Harry, bewildered; was Wood a cane she was going to use on him. He hadn't realized the wizarding world was that backwards that they actually still beat students.

As it turned out Wood wasn't a cane, but a person, a burly fifth-year boy who came out of Flitwick's class looking confused.

"Follow me, you two," said Professor McGonagall, and they marched on up the corridor, Wood looking curiously at Harry.

"In here." Professor McGonagall pointed them into a classroom that was empty except for Peeves, who was busy writing rude words on the blackboard.

"Out, Peeves!" she barked. Peeves threw the chalk into a bin, which clanged loudly, and he swooped out cursing. Professor McGonagall slammed the door behind him and turned to face the two boys.

"Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood – I've found you a Seeker." Wood's expression changed from puzzlement to delight.

"Are you serious, Professor?"

"Absolutely," said Professor McGonagall crisply. "The boy's a natural. I've never seen anything like it. Was that your first time on a broomstick, Potter."

Harry opened his mouth to say no, that he had been on a broom when he was little, but quickly caught himself, it wouldn't do to say that now and than be forced to explain himself. He shook his head absently, though with a certain feeling of excitement. If this was what he thought it was...

"He caught that thing in his hand after a fifty-foot dive," Professor McGonagall told Wood. "At less than two feet off the ground. Charlie Weasley couldn't have done it." Wood was now looking as though all his dreams had come true at once.

"Ever seen a game of Quidditch, Potter?" he asked excitedly.

"Wood's captain of the Gryffindor team," Professor McGonagall explained.

"He's just the build for a Seeker, too," said Wood, now walking around Harry and staring at him. "Light – speedy – but I see a good muscle build as well. Do you work out?" Harry didn't get a chance to answer as the fifth year continued, "We'll have to get him a decent broom, Professor – a Nimbus Two Thousand or a Cleansweep Seven, I'd say."

"I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can't bend the first-year rule. Heaven knows, we need a better team than last year.

Flattened in that last match by Slytherin, I couldn't look Severus Snape in the face for weeks..."

Professor McGonagall peered sternly over her glasses at Harry.

"I want to hear you're training hard, Potter, or I may change my mind about punishing you." Then she suddenly smiled. "Your father would have been proud," she said. "He was an excellent Quidditch player himself."

"Really?" asked Harry, suddenly interested, he only knew his parents from his memories and a lot of that they had been in hiding. Of course, James had often told him stories of his time as a Chaser for the Gryffindor team, as well as the two years he had played professionally, before the war had truly broken out.

"Yes, really," she said, then she gave him a stern glare. "Now, while I won't punish you for climbing on to the broom when you were told not to, I am going to have to punish you for what you did to Mr. Malfoy."

"That's fine Professor," Harry said, he knew that he deserved the punishment for that. However, in his mind any punishment was worth seeing the way Malfoy had cried like a baby after attempting to break Neville's rememberall.

"Good, now, I will hold off on the punishment until I can think of something suitable," she said. "Likely after Wood gets you trained up as I too, would like to win the Cup."

"We're going to have to keep this a secret," Wood suddenly said. "I don't want anyone who isn't on the team to know, it will be a surprise."

Harry looked over at Wood and shrugged. "I won't tell a soul," he promised.

XoX

Well done," said George in a low voice as he and Fred found Harry sitting on a couch in the Gryffindor common room. "Wood told us. We're on the team too – Beaters."

"I tell you, we're going to win that Quidditch cup for sure this year," said Fred. "We haven't won since Charlie left, but this year's team is going to be brilliant. You must be good, Harry, Wood was almost skipping when he told us."

"Anyway, we've got to go, Lee Jordan reckons he's found a new secret passageway out of the school."

"Bet it's that one behind the statue of Gregory the Smarmy that we found in our first week. See you."

Harry smiled as he went back to his reading, he looked at the way to brew the animagus potion and jotted down a few more notes based on some experimentation he had done to some of the surplus ingredients he had. He was almost ready to begin making the potion, it would take about three months to fully make because it had to sit for a long time so the ingredients could properly blend in with each other. He almost shivered in anticipation at the thought of discovering what his animal form was.

XoX

Later that day, Harry was sitting with his usual group of friends in the Great Hall, having dinner, when he looked over at the Slytherin table.

"What's up, Harry?" asked Neville. He had fully recovered from his fall, and when Harry went to visit him in the hospital to give him the remembrall he had been extremely grateful. The others also turned to Harry when he stood up.

"Scuze me for a second," said Harry.

He made his way over to the Slytherin table, well aware that he was once again drawing the attention of the entire Great Hall. He walked over to the spot where Blaise, Daphne and Tracey were sitting slightly separated from the other first year Slytherins.

"Hey," he greeted lightly as he sat down next to a surprised Tracey. "Sorry I haven't been talking to you three recently, I would have done it sooner but with Malfoy being a berk I couldn't find the time."

"What are you doing here, Potter?" asked Daphne in a cold voice.

"I thought that would be obvious," Harry said with a smile. "I wanted to talk to you three."

"Why?" asked Tracey, her voice a lot nicer than Daphne's, though a little cautious.

Harry shrugged. "Because you, or, at least you and Blaise were fairly nice to me and not too invasive when we spoke on the boat ride here. I figured we could be friends."

"Friends?" asked Tracey, an amused smile coming onto her face while Blaise watched curiously and Daphne just stared at Harry with cold, unfeeling eyes. "You do know that our houses hate each other, don't you?" she pointed out.

"I never put much stalk into the houses," Harry said, waving her point off. "Personally, I think the houses are an outdated form of sorting that should have been banned several hundred years ago."

"Oh?" Blaise leaned in with a look of interest on his face, "why would you think that?"

Harry gave a mysterious smile. "Why indeed?" he paused for a moment, then shrugging said, "students get sorted into their house based on the specific traits they embody. Now this may have been all well and good when the school was first founded, but eventually, when you have a group of like-minded individuals who only sort with each other it leads to stagnation and a mistrust with the other houses. Slytherin house is the best example of this."

"Why is that?" asked Daphne, her cold exterior was still up but Harry could hear a small quiver in her voice.

"Well, think about it," said Harry. "Nearly all the Death Eaters came from the Slytherin House, why? Because Hogwarts put a group of like-minded individuals, people who thought they were cunning and ambitious and were foolish enough to follow a man who made promises of power that he would never keep thanks to the greed they had cultivated from their ambitions."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Potter."



"Draco," Harry said with mock cheer as he turned to face the blond boy and his two goons. "How are you old buddy, old pal, old friend. I hear you went for a fly yesterday, how was that?"

Malfoy seemed to shrink for a second, remembering how Harry had humiliated him before sneering. "I suggest you watch your words, Potter," he said. "You don't know anything about the Dark Lord."

"Au contraire my stupid, bigoted friend," said Harry, ignoring the growl from Malfoy. "I've read the history, and I've certainly seen his type before."

If Vernon had magic, he would definitely have been a Dark Lord. History was also filled with people like Voldemort, even in the non-magical world; men like Adolph Hitler, Stalin, and many others who would burn the world and those around them in their quest for power and making the world in their likeness.

"People like Voldemort (Everyone at the Slytherin table, even Draco, Flinched at the Dark Lords name) don't share power, they wouldn't trust anyone enough to share power and they love to lord it over those who serve them. They use their silver tongue to fill your ears with sweet words and then stab you in the back and discard you like so much used trash as soon as you've outlived your usefulness. Why would someone who has all the power and loves having that power, give it away to someone else?"

Harry turned back around and held out a hand making a shooing gesture. "Go back to your seat and think about that," he finished.

Once again Malfoy stood there in indecision. Eventually Harry heard Malfoy's retreating steps. He looked around to see many of the Slytherin's eyeing him appraisingly, it seemed he had struck a chord with some of them. Blaise was giving him a calculating look, Daphne seemed introspective and Tracey was giving him a smile?

"You dealt with that pretty well," the brunette complimented.

"You don't seem too upset that I insulted your Dark Lord," Harry teased with a grin.

Tracey shrugged, leaned in and whispered, "I'm only a half-blood. I wouldn't have been accepted into You-Know-Who's ranks anyways."

Harry grinned, "oh, well that's good. Anyways, down to the real reason I came over here." The three, even Daphne, leaned in to hear what he had to say. "My friends and I have taken to studying in the library, I was actually coming over to invite you to join us."

They all blinked.

"That's it?" asked Tracey, as if she had been expecting more after his small speech.

"Well that, and I wanted to mess with Malfoy," Harry replied, standing up. "Anyways, we meet at Six every evening after dinner. Just meet us there if you want." With that said Harry left, making his way back over to his other friends. As he sat back down and started talking with Hannah he absently hoped the three would take him up on his offer. After all, Slytherin was going to be the hardest of the houses to change, so the sooner he got started the better.

XoX

A/N: So I've had a few people tell me my story is cliché'd. Now, I'll be honest and inform my esteemed readers that I have only ever read a grand total of ten Harry Potter Fics. The Curses Cure, The Path to Greatness, A Chance Encounter, The Lie I've lived, Hope, Happily Ever After, Letters, Perfect Situations, Matryoshka Vignettes, and Harry Potter and the Four Founders. That is more or less my limited knowledge on Harry Potter stories, the others I only read maybe 4 chapters at most before deciding I didn't like them. So I wouldn't really know what's cliché and what's not when it comes to Harry Potter.

However, what I do know is that Harry Potter has 544,455 stories on THIS site alone. Given the number of stories that have been posted I can almost guarantee that no matter what people come up with, it's bound to be cliché'd in one way or another. That being said, if all someone is going to do when they leave a review is tell me how cliché'd my story is, without backing up their claims with solid evidence of said clichés I've committed, along with telling me how you THINK I can fix them, then please do not leave a review. I write this story for my own enjoyment, and I am posting this story because someone else might enjoy reading it and I would like peoples

feedback on how I can make my story better. If you are not one of those people, you do not have to read it, nor do you have to review it.

That being said, for those of you who do enjoy this story, your reviews are appreciated, even if its just telling me you like my story. Ego inflations are always welcome.

## Chapter 6: Quidditch and Trolls

XoX

The next few days continued on as usual. Harry and his group of friends would sit together, either at the Hufflepuff or Gryffindor table, switching up every morning to have breakfast and then go to class. Harry ended up getting into a routine of wake up, work-out, take care of his hygienic needs, go to breakfast, class, lunch, class, free time with his friends, class (If it was a night for Astronomy, if not it would be more studying) and then bed, only to repeat the next day.

In class he continued to be the top in student, beating out all of the first years, including a disgruntled Hermione Granger, who was likely used to being the best academic student.

Harry had eventually gotten bored with many of the subjects they were studying in class, he had read ahead in for all of his courses, mainly due to the amount of free time he had on his hands. Even with classes, spending time with friends, helping said friends with their work, his morning exercise, and trying to become an animagus, Harry still found more free time on his hands than usual.

He partly blamed some of his classes. In history Harry had taken to completely ignoring Professor Binns, whose lectures had come straight out of the textbook verbatim, choosing instead to focus on reading the books on his other subjects and the ones he got from the library. He had managed to read through his entire charms book and half his Transfiguration book in that class so far.

D.A.D.A. was another class he stopped really paying attention to. Professor Quirrel had yet to teach them anything useful, spending more time stuttering over his words more than anything else. Harry had since taken to doing self-study on the subject. From what he understood of Defense Against the Dark Arts it focused on defensive techniques to block spells, charms, curses, hexes, and jinxes cast by other wizards and witches; counteract the Dark Arts, and to protect from dark magical beasts and creatures such as the boggart.

Harry had learned several spells in his spare time, such as the jelly-leg jinx, babbling hex, tickling charm and even a few that weren't taught to first years.

His time in potions had gotten considerably easier, Snape still sneered at him but Harry was rarely ever insulted and had not had any points taken since his first class. Everytime the man looked like he was about to berate him on something he was supposedly doing wrong, Snape would eye his notebook before turning pale and stalking off without even opening his mouth. Harry wasn't sure what was wrong with the man, but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

The only other thing of interest that had happened was Ron getting tricked into a duel with Malfoy, who had gone after the red head when all of the attempts made by the blond pureblood to goad Harry failed, where the raven haired youth would often turn the boys arguments against him. The morning after Ron had been seen loudly bragging about running into a Cerberus, a three headed dog that was said to be the guardians to the gates of the underworld, in a room on the third floor corridor. From the way Ron told it, he had faced the Cerberus down beat the crap out of it when it tried to attack him.

While Harry had not put much stock into the red heads bragging, hearing that there might be a Cerberus had sent warning alarms off in Harry's head. He had investigated Ron's claims on his own one night, using a powerful spell he had found and practiced by himself to turn invisible called a disillusionment charm, in order to sneak around the castle. He had almost been caught by Miss Norris, Filch's cat, but had been able to confirm that Ron was in fact telling the truth. Within the third room on the third floor corridor was a large three headed dog with black fur and a vicious look. The moment Harry had spotted the creature it had snapped at him, likely able to smell where he was since he had still had his disillusionment charm on at the time. He had been all too happy to leave the creature after that.

Another thing he had seen that Ron had likely missed, had been the trap door that dog had been standing over.

There were pieces of a puzzle that were falling into place within Harry's mind. The break-in at Gringotts', Hagrid's interest in it, and the Cerberus that was standing over a trap door, obviously guarding something. Something that had been in the Gringotts vault that had been broken into. The only real questions was, what was the Cerberus guarding?

XoX

Harry yawned a bit as he idly ate some bacon, it was the morning after he had confirmed the existence of a Cerberus on the third floor corridor and he had been trying to figure out what it could be guarding. He hadn't been able to think of anything yet, despite the amount of books he had read, there was just too much he didn't know about the magical world to make even an educated guess as to what it could be. It was beginning to drive him mad.

"Hey, Harry," Harry turned when he heard Susan's soft voice. "Are you alright?" she asked.

He gave her a small grin, "Yeah, I'm fine, just a little tired is all."

On the other side of Susan, Hannah snorted, "you don't get tired," she stated with absolute certainty. "I swear you've got more energy than a kappa."

"Yeah, but I was up late last night," Harry said, yawning in emphasis.

He was thankful when the owls began to arrive because his friend's attention was taken away from him. Harry had no intention of informing them why he had been up so late last night, whatever that Cerberus was guarding would mean trouble, and he didn't want them involved.

As the owls flooded into the Great Hall as usual, everyone's attention was caught at once by a long, thin package carried by six large screech owls. Harry watched in interest as the parcel was dropped on his table, his bacon was knocked off the table and Harry's hand lashed out, catching the pieces before they fell. They had hardly fluttered out of the way when another owl dropped a letter on top of the parcel.

Harry ripped open the letter first, which was lucky, because it said:

**DO NOT OPEN THE PARCEL AT THE TABLE.**

It contains your new Nimbus Two Thousand, but I don't want everybody knowing you've got a broomstick or they'll all want one.

Oliver Wood will meet you tonight on the Quidditch field at seven o'clock for your first training session.

Harry looked over at Professor McGonagall, who seemed to be having some difficulty holding in her glee. He grinned at her, grabbed the broom and gestured for Neville and Hermione to follow him.

"Susan, Hannah, I've got to take this package to my room so I'll see you two later," Harry said.

"Bye Harry!" they said at nearly the same time.

They left the hall quickly, wanting to unwrap the broomstick in private before their first class, but halfway across the entrance hall they found the way upstairs barred by Crabbe and Goyle. Malfoy tried to seize the package from Harry, but Harry was in no mood for the blond trying to goad him. His hand shot forward, grabbed Malfoy's hand and began to squeeze it hard enough for Malfoy to wince.

"I thought we'd been over you and you're stealing habits, Draco," Harry said with faux cheer. "First you want Neville's remembrall and now a gift one of my friends sent me, really, what am I going to do with you?"

Harry let go of Malfoy's hand and the boy stumbled back, hissing a bit as he rubbed his hand. "You're going to regret that," he said through gritted teeth, "just wait til my father hears about this!"

"You've been saying that for a while now," Harry pointed out. "And yet, I've yet to regret anything you said I would. As for your father," the raven haired boy narrowed his eyes at the ferret-like blond. "He's nothing more than Death Eater scum, you can send as many messages to your dear old dad as you want, but it won't amount to anything."

Malfoy's entire face turned red as he reached for his wand, but Harry wasn't going to allow him to grab it. Before the blond boy could even get his wand out of his robes, Harry lashed out with a palm thrust that hit the boy in the nose. There was a loud, cracking sound as Malfoy's nose broke.

"Gah!" Malfoy shouted, holding his bloody nose. He tried to glare at Harry through his tears, his voice cracking as he said, "wait until my father hears about this!"

As he ran off, with Grabbe and Goyle following him, Harry and his two friends continued on their journey. "That wasn't very nice, Harry," Hermione said.

"It wasn't suppose to be," Harry replied as they began walking. "Malfoy's a bully, and the only thing bullies understand is force. If you show that you're more powerful than them and not to be trifled with, they'll back off. At least for a little while." It would only be a matter of time before Draco tried to get back at them, bullies never stayed down for long. But Harry figured it wouldn't be for a while.

Hermione looked like she wanted to retort, but couldn't really think of anything to say and so she kept quiet. When they had gotten to the common room Harry unwrapped the parcel.

"Wow," Neville said as his eyes widened. "That's a Nimbus Two Thousand, the fastest broom on the market."

"You two can't tell what I'm about to tell you to anyone," Harry said seriously. "Professor McGonagall is letting me play on the Gryffindor team."

"But that's unheard of," Neville said in shock. "I don't think I've ever heard about a first year being allowed on the team."

"It's not against the rules," Hermione said with a frown. "In fact the only rules there are is that first years aren't allowed to bring their brooms."

"Technically this isn't mine," Harry inspected the broom, his eyes were drawn to some of the odd looking symbols along the handle. "It's Professor McGonagall's, she's just loaning it to me."

Neville choked back a laugh, "I've heard that Professor McGonagall is a secret Quidditch fanatic and has been in a bad way with Slytherin continuously winning the cup."

"I wonder what these are?" Harry muttered as he fingered the symbols that were running along the handle of the broom. There



were several more that he noticed as well, along the small groove where he was suppose to sit, and along the largest of the three golden bands that were holding the twigs together. Having never seen anything like them before, he was curious to know what they were.

"Those are Runes," Harry looked at Hermione and tilted his head in curiosity. "I've read about them before," she said, her voice taking on a note of glee at finally knowing something Harry didn't. "Runes are like carving a spell into something to make it permanent, their symbols that invoke magic. I heard we can choose to learn about them in our third year."

"Interesting," Harry had not read anything on Runes, but seeing as his broom had them he figured it would be good to see if there was a book on the subject.

He looked at the Nimbus Two Thousand with a grin, it was truly a beautiful broom. Sleek and shiny, with a mahogany handle, it had a long tail of neat, straight twigs and Nimbus Two Thousand written in gold near the top.

After admiring the broom for a little while longer the three went to their classes, Harry didn't really pay attention, he had already done the work for this week, and the next. Instead he found himself thinking about what playing Quidditch would be like, he had read a little bit about it and remembered the stories his father told him but that was it. He hadn't wanted to spoil the surprise so he didn't look any further into it. He hoped it would be fun, then again, he would be flying so he had no doubt it would.

XoX

Near six o'clock Harry, Neville, Hermione, Hannah and Susan went to the library where they began doing their homework. A few minutes later Blaise, Daphne and Tracey entered and walked over to their table.

"I was wondering if you guys would ever come," Harry said with a smile as he looked up at them.

"Yeah, yeah, well, here we are," Tracey said with dramatic flair as she went into a pose, her left hand held above her head, with her

right hand behind her holding her left arm and her hips cocked at a slight angle. "I bet you missed me, huh?"

Blaise snorted while Harry laughed and the others looked on in confusion. They were forced to quiet down when Madame Pince came over and told them to stop talking unless they wanted to get thrown out.

Tracey decided to sit next to Harry, making Hannah scoot over, much to the strawberry blond's displeasure. Harry shot her a small apologetic smile before focusing on the Slytherins.

"So what are you all going to be working on?" he asked. Blaise was sitting next to a nervous looking Neville, while Daphne was sitting as far away from everyone else as possible.

"Charms," Tracey replied instantly, "I'm terrible at charms, I don't know why."

Harry grinned, "I can help you there, I'm pretty good at charms." The other four who had originally came with Harry snorted.

"Is there anything you're not good at?" asked Tracey dryly.

"Hmmm..." Harry struck a thinking pose. "Well I can't sing," he said at last.

"That wasn't what I meant."

"I know," Harry said, grinning. "I don't know what I'm not good at, but when I find out, you'll be the first to know."

"Right," Tracey said with a sardonic shake of her head.

"Now let's get cracking, this homework won't take care of itself you know."

The group worked together to do complete their homework. Harry had been finished long before they had even gone to the library, like several days before and ended up flitting around and helping the others until they finished. Their talking had attracted the attention of Madame Pince once again, and after she had finished scolding them Harry brought out his wand.

"Muffliato," he whispered, there was a small light emitted from his wand that died down seconds later. "There we go," Harry said in a cheerfully loud voice.

"What did you just do?" asked Tracey, "and why are you talking so loud."

"Silencing charm," answered Harry, "and I was talking loud because I can. See, no Madame Pince."

Everyone noticed that Harry was right, Madame Pince had not come to berate him on his loud voice yet, or to kick them out.

"Why didn't you just do that before?" asked Hannah.

Harry shrugged, "I've never actually used that spell so I wouldn't know if it would actually work or not."

"So we could have all just gotten kicked out!"

"Well, maybe." Harry grinned at the exasperated look Hannah had. He looked from her to the window and noticed it was getting dark, he waved his wand and cast a tempus spell. It was fifteen till seven.

"I've got to head out," Harry said. "I promised someone I'd meet them at seven, so I'll see you lot later."

The two other Gryffindors and two Hufflepuffs said their own good byes, Blaise gave him a nod of acknowledgement, Daphne ignored him, and Tracey grinned.

"Malfoy can't stop ranting about how stupid you are in the common room," she said. "But I don't think he knows what he's talking about, you're not half bad, Potter."

"Call me Harry," he said absently, "anyways I'll see you."

"Are you alright, Hermione?" asked Neville.

Hermione, who had been watching Harry as he walked away with a frown of contemplation, turned to him. "That silencing spell was a

fourth year spell," she said, "I tried it several times but I still can't do it."

"Is that a problem?" asked Susan, overhearing the small conversation.

"Well, no, not exactly," Hermione admitted. "It's just he makes everything look so easy, he always has the homework done and always gets the spells we were given right on his first try, but I've never seen him work on homework or study."

"That's true," Neville said, "he usually spends his time helping us. I do sometimes see him reading in bed, but there not our class books."

"What does he read?" asked Hermione.

"Advanced stuff," Neville replied, "recently he's been reading a book on organic to inorganic transfiguration."

"But...but that's fifth year material, that's O.W.L. level work!" Hermione gasped, bringing the attention of the others. "There must be some mistake, I don't care how good he is, there's no way he can do organic to inorganic transfiguration."

"I'm just telling you what he was reading," Neville said, shrugging helplessly.

"He could just be that good," Tracey pointed out as she decided to get into the conversation. "I mean he's the top student in every class, he could be really advanced."

"But he said he lived in the muggle world with his relatives," Susan stated, "how advanced can he get in just less than two months?"

Tracey shrugged, "I couldn't tell you. We could just ask him though."

"Maybe."

Hermione looked back towards the door Harry had walked out of, she wondered how much further ahead Harry really was.

XoX

Harry marveled at the Quidditch field, having never bothered to come over here yet it made for quite a sight. Hundreds of seats were raised in stands around the field so that the spectators were high enough to see what was going on. At either end of the field were three golden poles with hoops on the end. They reminded Harry of the little plastic sticks Muggle children blew bubbles through, except that they were fifty feet high.

Since Wood wasn't here yet, Harry decided to get a feel for the broom so he would be warmed up for whatever the captain had planned. He mounted his Nimbus and then blasted off like a rocket. Taking the broom through some sharp turns he had a chance to marvel at just how well the broom flew, it responded to his touch almost before he made it, and the speeds the broom could get were unbelievable.

"Hey, Potter, come down!" Oliver Wood had arrived. He was carrying a large wooden crate under his arm. Harry grinned as he flew into a steep dive, pulling up just two feet off the ground and jumping off.

"Very nice," said Wood, his eyes glinting and Harry felt a slight shiver at the maniacal look. "I see what McGonagall meant... you really are a natural. I'm just going to teach you the rules this evening, then you'll be joining team practice three times a week." He opened the crate. Inside were four different-sized balls.

"Right," said Wood. "Now, Quidditch is easy enough to understand, even if it's not too easy to play. There are seven players on each side. Three of them are called Chasers."

Harry nodded, he had read up on the positions.

Wood took out a bright red ball about the size of a soccer ball. "This ball's called the Quaffle," said Wood. "The Chasers throw the Quaffle to each other and try and get it through one of the hoops to score a goal. Ten points every time the Quaffle goes through one of the hoops. Follow me."

They made their way over to one side of the pitch, where three goal posts stood. "Now, there's another player on each side who's called the Keeper – I'm Keeper for Gryffindor. I have to fly around our hoops and stop the other team from scoring."

"Now these are called Bludgers," he said, pointing to two identical black balls. Harry noticed that they seemed to be straining to escape the straps holding them inside the box. "Take this." He handed Harry a small club, a bit like a short baseball bat.

"Stand back," Wood warned Harry. He bent down and freed one of the Bludgers.

At once, the black ball rose high in the air and then pelted straight at Harry's face. Harry's reflexes kicked in and he smashed the Bludger with the bat, sending it sailing into the stands where it broke through several seats. It came back out of the stands and then shot at Wood, who dived on top of it and managed to pin it to the ground.

"I'll fix that," Harry said somewhat sheepishly as he waved his wand at the stands and watched as the broken seats mended themselves together.

"Damn, you hit hard," Wood panted, forcing the struggling Bludger back into the crate and strapping it down safely. "You'd make a good Beater. Anyways, the Bludgers rocket around, trying to knock players off their brooms. That's why you have two Beaters on each team – the Weasley twins are ours – it's their job to protect their side from the Bludgers and try and knock them toward the other team. So – think you've got all that?"

"Yeah, I've got it," Harry said. Three Chasers try and score with the Quaffle; the Keeper guards the goal posts; the Beaters keep the Bludgers away from their team," he reeled off.

"Very good," said Wood.

"Now, the last member of the team is the Seeker. That's you. And you don't have to worry about the Quaffle or the Bludgers unless they crack my head open."

"Now's there's a pleasant thought," Harry said jokingly.

"Don't worry, the Weasleys are more than a match for the Bludgers – I mean, they're like a pair of human Bludgers themselves." Wood reached into the crate and took out the fourth and last ball.

Compared with the Quaffle and the Bludgers, it was tiny, about the size of a large walnut. It was bright gold and had little fluttering silver wings.

"This," said Wood, "is the Golden Snitch, and it's the most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast and difficult to see. It's the Seeker's job to catch it. You've got to weave in and out of the Chasers, Beaters, Bludgers, and Quaffle to get it before the other team's Seeker, because whichever Seeker catches the Snitch wins his team an extra hundred and fifty points, so they nearly always win. That's why Seekers get fouled so much. A game of Quidditch only ends when the Snitch is caught, so it can go on for ages – I think the record is three months, they had to keep bringing on substitutes so the players could get some sleep."

"Well, that's it – any questions?"

"Nope, I'm good," said Harry, looking at the snitch. "You mind if I try my hand and catching the Snitch?"

"We won't practice with the Snitch yet," said Wood, carefully shutting it back inside the crate, "it's too dark, we might lose it. Let's try you out with a few of these." He pulled a bag of ordinary golf balls out of his pocket and a few minutes later, he and Harry were up in the air, Wood throwing the golf balls as hard as he could in every direction for Harry to catch.

Harry didn't miss a single one, and Wood was delighted. After half an hour, night had really fallen and they couldn't carry on.

"That Quidditch cup'll have our name on it this year," said Wood happily as they trudged back up to the castle. "I wouldn't be surprised if you turn out better than Charlie Weasley, and he could have played for England if he hadn't gone off chasing dragons."

XoX

Harry was finally being kept fairly busy, between his morning exercise, Homework, studying and spending time with his friends, his animagus project, and now the Quidditch practice he had three times a week, Harry had finally found most of his time full. Before he knew it two months had passed and Harry found that he felt more at

home here than he ever had at the Dursleys', not that such an accomplishment was hard.

The only thing Harry really missed, was his friend Lisa, who he had not been able to talk to because he had no way of communicating. After all, if an owl bearing a letter from him went to her, it would require an explanation that he simply didn't have, and he couldn't come out and tell her the truth. Still, he hoped she was doing well, and promised himself he would spend the summer making up for his absence with her.

Maybe they let students out for Christmas. If they did, he could easily make it up to her then.

While he was being kept busy now, his classes were still boring. Professor Flitwick announced in Charms that he thought they were ready to start making objects fly, Harry had been levitating objects since he was six, it had been the very first bit of magic he had mastered, the only thing he still had trouble levitating was himself, and that was simply because it required an astronomical amount of power to maintain the levitation charm.

Professor Flitwick put the class into pairs to practice. Harry's partner was Seamus Finnigan, he was a bit sad that he hadn't gotten Neville or Hermione but Seamus was an alright bloke. Harry really felt for Hermione though, who had the misfortune of being paired up with Ron Weasley.

Ron had been getting increasingly unpleasant to Harry, his friends, and just about everyone around him. The boy was nearly friendless as far as Harry could see, even the Weasley Twins seemed to think he was getting worse.

"Now, don't forget that nice wrist movement we've been practicing!" squeaked Professor Flitwick, perched on top of his pile of books as usual. "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick. And saying the magic words properly is very important, too – never forget Wizard Baruffio, who said 's' instead of 'f' and found himself on the floor with a buffalo on his chest."

Harry let Seamus go first and debated how to cast the spell. He didn't need the swish and flick that the diminutive Professor wanted the class to do. Through his reading Harry had learned that wand



movements and incantations were largely unnecessary for spell casting, indeed even wands were not needed as he could attest to. However, the wand, the movement and the incantation all helped those who had trouble visualizing the spell, they provided focus so that the spells would work better for those who couldn't focus on their own.

Spells, he had read in *Magic Theory Made Easy*, were ninety percent visualization and intent, and ten percent wand movement and incantation. If you could picture what you wanted done within your mind and focused your magic, you could make it happen.

Harry watched as Seamus swished and flicked, but the feather he was supposed to be sending skyward just lay on the desktop. Seamus got so impatient that he prodded it with his wand and set fire to it – Harry waved his wand and the fire died out.

"Professor Flitwick," Harry called, "can we have another feather?"

"Of course Mr. Potter," Flitwick floated a feather to them, "but please try not to set this one on fire."

"I'll do my best, Professor," said Harry dryly.

"Why don't you try now," Seamus suggested, who was looking somewhat disgruntled.

"Sure," Harry decided what he would do and made a very lazy swish and flick with his wand, visualizing the feather floating in the air above his head. The feather gently lifted off the table and floated up above Harry's head.

"Marvelous work, Mr. Potter!" Flitwick squeaked. "Ten points to Gryffindor!"

Several of the other students looked upset at him getting the spell right first, again. But Harry just ignored them.

"How did you do that?" asked Seamus, looking slightly put out.

"Try this," Harry set the feather next to Seamus. "Picture the feather lifting off the table and floating above your head, then cast the spell."

You need to be able to imagine the feather floating in your mind, not just focus on the wand movements and incantation."

"Ok," Seamus tried again, doing as Harry told him to, and was ecstatic to see his feather floating in the air. "Yeah! I did it!"

"You see, it's easy," said Harry with a grin.

At the next table, Ron was trying, and failing utterly to cast the spell.

Wingardium Leviosa!" he shouted, waving his long arms like a windmill.

"You're saying it wrong," Harry heard Hermione snap. "It's Wing-gardium Levi-o-sa, make the 'gar' nice and long."

"You do it, then, if you're so clever," Ron snarled.

Hermione rolled up the sleeves of her gown, flicked her wand, and said, "Wingardium Leviosa!"

Their feather rose off the desk and hovered about four feet above their heads. Ron looked like he was about to blow his top at seeing someone else perform the spell he was having trouble with so easily.

When class ended Harry bade a quick good bye to Neville and Hermione and rushed off down the corridor. He went through several corridors, up a few stairs and passed a number of doors, stopping when he reached his destination.

"Harry? What are you doing here?" asked Susan as she walked out of class with Hannah.

"I just wanted to talk to Professor McGonagall about something," Harry said.

"Just don't be late for the feast," Hannah reminded him.

"I won't," Harry promised, making his way into Professor McGonagall's classroom.

"Professor?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter? Can I help you?" asked Professor McGonagall, giving him a smile that he knew others rarely saw. Harry was easily her favorite student; she had often complimented him and told him how much of a prodigy he was at Transfiguration, like his father. "You do know you're supposed to be in class right now?"

"I told Professor Quirrel I had something I needed to talk to you about," Harry said.

"Well then, I'm all ears," she turned her attention to him fully. "What's so important that you had to skip class?"

"Well because I have several friends in other houses, we've been spending a lot of time at the library," started Harry.

"I know," professor McGonagall said with a small note of amusement, "Madame Pince is quite put out with the amount of noise you lot make."

"Quite," Harry agreed, she had actually thrown them out last night. "Part of the reason we've been getting so loud is because our numbers seem to have, increased, as of late."

They had recently been joined by several Ravenclaws, mainly Lisa Turpin, Terry Boot and Padme Patil. There was also a few second and third years from all houses minus Slytherin who had joined them on rare occasion, and Tonks, along with the Weasley twins had also visited, causing enough ruckus for the entire group.

"I see," Professor McGonagall looked at him with an even stare. "And what are you asking me about?"

"I was hoping we could commandeer one of the unused classrooms," said Harry, getting to the point. "I have a few classrooms in mind that look like they've been abandoned for several decades, I was hoping, with your permission, that I could get some help from the house elves to convert one of them into a clubroom of sorts. A place where all the houses can spend time together."

Professor McGonagall looked at Harry as she thought about his request, it was a rather good idea, though there were a few details she felt were missing.

"I think you have a good idea, Mr. Potter," she said at last. "Though, I have a few questions before I decide whether to allow this or not."

"That's fine professor," Harry shrugged. "I figured you'd have some."

Professor McGonagall raised an eyebrow but nodded. "Is this 'clubhouse' for just you and your friends? I only ask because I think it would be a good idea for others to know about it."

"Anyone will be able to come," Harry said. "I can post a notice on the bulletin board near the Great Hall telling other students about it. Of course, we'll need to have a list of rules if a lot of people decide to spend time there, and a way to enforce the rules."

"If you can create a list of the rules I'll take it to Professor Flitwick and he'll charm the parchment. Any student who enters, will have to sign in and their magic will be bound to the rules so long as they are in there," Professor McGonagall said.

"That would work," said Harry, "you don't think Professor Flitwick would let me observe him charm the parchment do you?"

Professor McGonagall's lips twitched upwards a bit, Harry reminded her so much of his parents it wasn't even funny. He was almost a near perfect mixture of the two, with James' charm and confidence and Lily's curiosity and studiousness. "I think he would be extremely pleased to have someone take an interest in his work," she said. "Also, you said this place will be for students of all houses to spend time together, but you haven't really explained what you will be using it for."

Harry tilted his head for a moment in thought. "Well since it will be a place to hang out I figured it would be similar to the house common rooms, as far as looks wise anyways. We'll have areas with couches and chairs where people can just relax, tables so people can do their homework, I was also thinking about bringing in all kinds of games."

"Like what?" asked Professor McGonagall, sounding a little worried.

"Well, I don't know what kind of wizarding games exist, but we can get a few of those," Harry responded. "However, I was really

thinking about getting a few muggle games, like card decks for poker and blackjack, and board games, muggles have loads of those, Monopoly, Life, Mouse Trap," he ticked off fingers as he named all the games he knew of from the muggle world. "Anyways, I figured I can get a few of those here after Christmas."

"That sounds like a good idea," Professor McGonagall stated. "Come to me when you have the rules written down, I'll take this idea to the other teachers so they know, they may be able to help with this...project."

"Thank you, Professor," Harry said with a small bow.

"You're welcome," she said, "now, off with you."

Harry grinned as he walked off, making his way towards his next class. He got in and took a seat, frowning when he noticed Hermione was missing but didn't have much time to ask anyone about her whereabouts as Professor Quirrel began stuttering out his lesson. As dinner started in the Great Hall Harry became worried when Hermione still hadn't shown up.

"Nev, where's Hermione?" he asked.

"Don't know, I haven't seen her since charms," Neville said with a helpless shrug.

Harry frowned, "Hey Pavarti!" he called out, getting Pavarti's attention, "where's Hermione?"

"Some people saw her running into the girls bathroom crying," Pavarti said.

"Do you know why?"

Pavarti looked over at Ron and Harry understood. He decided he would deal with Ron later, right now, he had a friend who needed him. "I'll go and bring her here," he said.

"We'll go with you," Hannah stated, standing up as well.

"No, I won't be long," Harry said, "just save us our seats and I'll be back shortly."

XoX

Harry made his way to the dungeons bathroom where Hermione had last been seen, he used several of the secret passages that the Weasley twins had shown him to shorten the time it took to get there, and stopped when he reached his destination. Sighing he silently prayed no one would ever find out about this as he entered the girls bathroom.

He took a look around the room for a moment before walking over to the ivory stall that had the weak sounds of sobbing coming from behind its doors. Harry lightly knocked the stall door "Hermione, are you in there. It's Harry."

"Go away," Hermione said, sniffing. "I want to be alone."

Why did girls always say that? Lisa always said that when she was sad but Harry knew it was a lie, often times she wanted a hug and just wouldn't admit it.

"Now what kind of friend would I be if I left you alone?" asked Harry rhetorically. "Not a very good one, I can tell you that."

Hermione sniffed and made some hiccupping sounds, but didn't respond to him.

Harry sighed, "why don't you tell me what happened?"

"I don't want to."

"It could help," said Harry, "come on, we're friends right?"

"It was after we left charms class," Hermione sniffed. "You know I had been trying to help that boy, Ron, with his spell, but he got so angry at me. After you left he began yelling at me, saying I was a 'know-it-all' and I didn't have any friends."

"You didn't actually listen to him did you?" Harry groaned. Her silence was enough of an answer.

"Hermione, Ron is the one who has no friends," Harry said. "Everyone, even Seamus and Dean can't stand being near him, he's

just jealous. Besides, I'm your friend, aren't I? and so is Neville, and Hannah and Susan and, well, I don't know about Blaise, Tracey and Daphne yet, but give them time and they'll come around. The point is, you have loads of friends."

"I know but it still hurt, I was always made fun of like that when I was younger," Harry heard some shuffling from the other side. "I-I've never had many friends, everyone always called me beaver-teeth, or teacher's pet, or bossy-know-it-all-bookworm, just because I like to read and wanted to prove that I was smart. I can barely think of anyone who wanted to play with me when I was little."

"Well, you don't have to worry about that anymore, right?" said Harry firmly. "You have me and everyone else who want to spend time and play with you. Now, come on out of there, there's a feast that you're missing and I'm sure you're hungry."

There was a moment of silence before the stall door slowly started to open revealing Hermione with puffy red eyes and a slightly runny nose. Harry smiled at her and waved his wand in front of her face, cleaning her up as best he could. "There," he said, "now let's get you to the feast."

Hermione gave him a grateful smile, they started to walk out the door only for Harry to stop and wrinkle his nose. "Do you smell that?"

"Smell what?" Hermione paused and took several sniffs of the air, there was something but it was fairly faint. "I can smell something, but I can't tell what."

"Me neither," Harry's nose crinkled as whatever it was got stronger, it was easily the most unpleasant odor he had ever come across. "But whatever it is I don't want to be here when it comes, let's go."

The two of them started to move faster but it seemed that whatever they were smelling had smelled them as well. A large green foot slammed down at the bend of the hallways right in front of them. Hermione froze in shock as the rest of the creature finally walked into view. Harry recognized it from one of his books as a troll of some kind, he couldn't tell which because he hadn't done any in depth studying and only read a small segment about them. The thing was ugly, large and green with a stupid looking face and

smelled worse than Dudley after a time when he had fallen into horse shit, and carried a large wooden club that was being dragged behind it.

"What is that!" Hermione shrieked, alerting the troll to their presence.

Harry swore as he flicked his wrist, releasing his wand, "it's a troll!"

He pushed Hermione behind him as the troll started to charge towards the pair clumsily, letting out a roar.

"Damn it!" Harry may not have read on different types of trolls, but one thing he had read was that all trolls were undeniably stronger than any human, even wizards. Thankfully, they were all very stupid and very slow.

"Stupify!" a red bolt of energy shot out of Harry's wand, hitting the troll in the belly and dissipating as it impacted against the skin. He cursed when it had no effect and only seemed to make the troll angry. Damn it, the thing was magically resistant.

"Run!" he yelled to Hermione.

"But..."

"Don't but me! Just run! Get help!" the way he spoke left no room for argument and Hermione took off and Harry was just in time to dodge the troll's first attack.

Harry snarled as the troll swung its club horizontally. He jumped over it, placing a hand on the top and using some of his magic to push himself off. The club smashed into the suit of armor that was near the wall, sending showers of metal across the ground. The troll roared and tried again, bringing its club overhead and smashing it down. Harry sidestepped, letting the floor take the damage, cracking it and leaving a large imprint.

Harry quickly threw several spells at the troll but they were all very limited, the only serious offensive spell he had was the stupefy, a fourth year stunner spell. Why couldn't he be facing something smaller and less powerful than a troll? Anything else and he would have just smashed its face in and been done with. He swore to



himself that if he got out of this alive he was going to study up on more offensive magic.

The troll made another attack and in desperation Harry grabbed hold of his magic and began to push it through his wand, all his thoughts focused on keeping that damn club away from him. He slashed out with his wand, sending a burst of magic towards the troll. It hit the club, shattering it and the troll stumbled back, seemingly in shock.

It looked at its now clubless hand for a moment, then roared. Harry was tired from having pushed out so much magic and was therefore unprepared when the thing smacked him, hard. He was sent skidding across the ground, rolling on to his stomach when he stopped. A groan escaped him as he began to push himself back up. That thing hit hard, Harry could easily feel at least two broken ribs.

He stood up and held his ribs with the hand that was not holding his wand. His reserves of magic were beginning to run dry thanks to his reckless use of it with that last attack; whatever he had done to destroy that club had taken a lot out of him. His ribs were in pretty bad shape, that hit hurt more than when Master Wei hit him. He would need to be creative if he wanted to end this.

Looking around Harry spotted the suit of armor next to him, more specifically, the sword it was holding. He discarded using his wand and took direct application of his magic, grabbing onto the sword and levitating it before him. The troll was stalking towards him now, an enraged expression on its face.

"Come on you ugly piece of shit!" Harry yelled as he waited for the troll to get closer, he would only have one shot at this. The troll roared and made to swat him again.

Harry reacted before it could even begin to swing its fist, gesturing with his hand his magic shot the sword straight at the troll, piercing one of the only areas that was weak against magic and physical attacks. Its eyes.

The sword pierced right through the troll's left eye, penetrating the sclera, the lens and going straight into its brain. The large, ugly creature didn't even release a gurgle as it fell back, hitting the ground with a large boom.

Harry slumped against the wall, sliding down it until he was sitting on the ground. He looked at his hands, they were shaking pretty badly. He wasn't sure how to feel about killing the troll, it was attacking him and his friend, and he had done the only thing he could think of defend against the creature. But despite it being an extraordinarily stupid and violent creature, it was still a living being.

He spent the next few minutes, eyes closed, trying to work around his emotions. He was sad that he had been forced to kill but if given the choice between himself and his friends and that of the troll, he would choose himself and his friends any day.

As he sat there, feeling like he was on the verge of passing out, the four head of houses came in with Professor Quirell behind them, who passed out again as soon as he saw the dead troll.

"Dear Merlin," Professor McGonagall held a hand to her mouth at the scene before her. "Mr. Potter, are you alright?"

"M'fine," Harry grunted, he opened his eyes and stared at them. "I have at least one broken rib and..." he lifted up his shirt and hissed, "internal bleeding."

"What happened?" asked Professor Sprout, eying the dead troll with apprehension.

"I'll tell you, but later," said Harry, "right now, I feel like I'm about to pass out and I should probably get to the hospital wing."

The heads all snapped to attention at that.

"Yes, of course, Filius," Professor McGonagall said. "I'll trust you and Severus to dispose of the Troll's...body. Pomona, tell Professor Dumbledore that the troll is taken care of, I'm going to escort my student to the Madame Pomfrey."

The teachers all got to work, Snape eying Harry warily as he did. Professor McGonagal levitated Harry into the air and began making her way to the hospital wing.

Harry shut his eyes and let his breathing slow, he had held on long enough to channel a bit of magic to his wound, and with the help of

whomever was in charge of the hospital he should be as good as new tomorrow. With that thought in mind he let himself pass out.

XoX

Someone in a review in my last chapter asked for action. Here we go, action. Harry faces down a Troll, nearly gets killed, ends up killing the troll instead.

So few people think Harry might be too powerful. I suppose from a certain point of view I can see how they would think that. Try to bear in mind that right now the only people you have to compare Harry to are the other students that I have introduced, naturally he is going to seem lightyears ahead of them. However, in reality Harry is around a third or fourth year when it comes to his magical abilities. You guys haven't really seen him do anything, which I hopefully just remedied with that troll, at least a little bit.

## Chapter 7: The Quidditch Game

XoX

Professor Albus Dumbledore was a man who was considered the premiere wizard of his time. He was powerful, possessing more magic than the entire Ministry and Wizengamot combined, he was wise, having nearly one hundred and thirty years of experience and hardships behind him. A prodigal genius in magic, even at a young age and one of the only people in the world who was able to stand toe to toe with Voldemort at the height of his power.

Things rarely ever escaped his notice, whether in the castle he taught at or out, he knew everything there was to know about anything. He even knew, or at least suspected that Voldemort was alive somewhere, if not as whole as he once was.

Yet as he sat there listening to the report his second in command, Minerva McGonagall was giving him, he couldn't help but feel that he had missed something.

"Minerva, are you telling me that young Harry took on a troll, by himself and killed it?" he asked as his deputy headmistress paused for a breath.

"Yes, Albus, that is exactly what I am telling you," she said. The other teachers around her, those who had been at the scenes aftermath all confirmed it, even though Snape looked disgruntled at doing so.

He frowned, "do we know how he did it?"

"I can only guess," McGonagall said slowly. At his gesture she continued, "when we had gotten there, Mr. Potter was sitting against a wall, he was in pretty bad shape, several broken ribs and internal bleeding. However the troll was dead, there was a sword pierced through its left eye that had penetrated its brain. I would hazard a guess that, Mr. Potter, used the Leviosa spell and managed to throw the sword into it."

"Do you know why he killed the troll?" asked Dumbledore, the thought that Harry had actually killed something, even a creature as stupid and violent as a troll unnerved him. Very few people could kill,

most humans simply couldn't stomach the thought of killing. That Harry could do it so easily was troubling. "Have you talked to him about other ways he could have subdued it?"

Professor McGonagall looked at Dumbledore like he had lost his marbles. "Are you serious Albus? The boy was nearly killed! Along with his friend, one Hermione Jean Granger. He is only a first year so his spell repertoire is limited and a troll has a high resistance to magic and physical attacks, naturally, he did the only thing he could think of. Using a weapon that could hurt it, and hitting it in the only place it was vulnerable. I believe he was more focused on surviving, than subduing."

"I have to agree with Minerva," Filius added his own defense, personally, he was extremely impressed that a wizard as young as Harry was capable of using any spell under such an extreme condition. "We all know how tough trolls are to take down, even most fully grown wizards can't kill one, and it's much harder to subdue something that is so resistant to most forms of attack. That young Harry is even alive is something we should consider a blessing."

Professor Dumbledore closed his eyes in thought for a moment, wondering what Harry had been thinking when he killed that troll. He would need to investigate this, it would be difficult since he could not use legillemency against Harry if what the sorting hat had said about the young man possessing Occlumency was true, but Dumbledore could not allow another Tom Riddle to come alive.

He would have to keep an eye on the raven haired youth. Harry Potter was the future of the wizarding world, and only with Dumbledore's guidance could he become the man he was meant to be.

"Very well then, let us move on." He would watch Harry more closely from now on, making sure that he was there in case the young boy began to take a darker path. He would be there to make sure he could guide Harry back to the light, should it be deemed necessary.

"How are the students getting on? Are the muggle borns doing well?" he asked, smoothly changing the subject. Many of the muggle-born students would often get home sick during their first

few months, last year several had been forced to take a calming draught for several weeks.

"A few were let in to the hospital wing for home sickness," Minerva said. "We gave them calming draughts and dreamless sleep potions."

"See to it that they are comfortable," Albus said. "Now is there anything else we need to talk about?" no one answered. "Very good, now, are there any new students to take note of?"

"Mr. Potter," said Professor McGonagall, everyone could hear the pride in her voice. "He has shown an amazing aptitude for Transfiguration that surpasses even his father, he is always first to master a spell in class. During our first class he was able to non-verbally Transfigure a match into a needle and has continued to use non-verbal casting for all of his spells. He also helped the other students get the spells down, while none managed to finish the spell in the first class. All of them had progressed further than any other class I've had to date."

"He's also the top student in charms," Filius Flitwick added. "He managed to cast the wingardium Leviosa spell on his first try, non-verbally as well."

"He's a most pleasant young man as well," added Professor Sinistra, smiling a little bit. "He is very polite and I have had many conversations with him about how muggles study Astronomy, he strikes me as very studious."

"He has also made friends in every house," added Sprout, that was what she loved most about the young man. Being the head of the Hufflepuf house, loyalty was the most important thing to her, and Harry seemed to have that in spades. "Aside from Hannah, Susan and a few others of my house, I have seen him with several Ravenclaws and even a few Slytherins."

"H-He is v-v-v-very good at w-w-warding f-f-from vampires," added a stuttering professor Quirrel.

"So Mr. Potter is a very good student then?" asked Professor Dumbledore with interest. From the moment he had seen Harry in the Great Hall, the confidence in the boys stride, the fact that the

sorting hat had been unable to penetrate his mind due to the Occlumency shields the boy had, he had known that Harry would likely be talented. It was a bit of a surprise to be honest, he knew that the Dursleys were not very good muggles, and would likely neglect young Harry. Though he could not be sure since he had never checked on the boy after dropping him on their doorstep.

Did Harry's confidence and ability come from having a loving family? Had Petunia and Vernon taken the higher road and treated him like a son? Or was Harry's strength and intelligence just a sign of his perseverance through hardship? These were answers that Dumbledore didn't know, though it may be beneficial to find out.

Professor Flitwick snorted, "that is a very mild way of putting it. I suspect that he has studied much further ahead than our curriculum. He often seems very bored during my lectures, and usually spends time helping others master the spells I give during class." He paused as he came to his conclusion, "I suspect he practices outside of class and has them mastered long before he even enters the classroom."

"He has also come to me with a very intriguing idea," Professor McGonagall interjected.

"Oh?" Professor Dumbledore turned to Minerva.

"He has requested use of one of the abandoned classrooms to convert into a sort of common room for all of the houses to spend time together," she said.

Now this was something that interested Dumbledore. He leaned against the table, "I see."

"I am planning on having the House elves help expand the rooms and I was going to transfigure some furniture," Professor McGonagall admitted. She turned to Professor Flitwick, "I was actually hoping you might wish to help charming the classroom once Mr. Potter comes to me with a list of rules?"

"I would be honored," Professor Flitwick replied happily. While James Potter had been Minerva's favorite student, Lily had been Flitwick's, and Harry had just as much talent in charms as his mother did, maybe even more.

"I can help ward the room if you'd like?" offered Professor Babbling.

"That would be appreciated," said McGonagall. They all stopped talking and turned to Albus.

"I can also help with some of the transfiguration and warding," Professor Dumbledore rubbed his chin in thought. It was a good idea, and if Harry had suggested it maybe there was nothing to worry about when it came to him going dark. Voldemort would have never done something like this when he was at Hogwarts.

"Do you have anything to say about Mr. Potter, Severus?" he asked, turning to the potions Professor.

Professor Snape opened his mouth, then closed it, frowning. He wanted to say that the boy was a loud mouthed braggart and an attention seeking brat with no talent to his name. But that would be a lie so blatant even he couldn't admit it. The boy was talented, he almost reminded him of an odd combination of James Potter, who while an arrogant braggart that loved to bully him, was very popular with many students, Lily Potter, who was kind to just about everyone, and even himself, studious and talented in potions and many other forms of magic. He still didn't like the brat, and probably never would, but he would at least give respect where it was due.

Grimacing, he said, "Mr. Potter is an...adept, brewer, unlike his arrogant father."

"Why, Severus, that's the highest praise I've heard you give a student, ever," joked Professor Flitwick. McGonagall felt a burst of pride for her student. Considering how much Severus hated Harry father, getting any praise from the man was an incredible feat.

"I see, please keep an eye on Mr. Potter, I am curious to see how he does for the rest of the year," said Professor Dumbledore.

XoX

Harry had been let out of the hospital the morning after the troll incident completely healed, much to the surprise of Madame Pomfrey who had thought he would need another day or two. By that time rumor had already spread about Harry's battle with the troll,



there were some who thought he had wrestled the troll with his bare hands, others who said he used a powerful spell that disintegrated it, and still some felt he had done something else entirely. The number of theories behind his defeat of the troll were numerous, and Harry was once again the center of stares and awed whispers.

"Did you hear?"

"About the troll?"

"I heard he fought it with his bare hands!"

"I heard he managed to throw it out the seventh floor window with a single spell."

The only people who knew anything close to the truth (aside from the teachers who knew exactly what happened) were Hermione and his other friends, who knew he had killed a troll but not how. They had all pouted for a bit, especially Hannah and Tracey who were like two sides of the same coin, but he didn't want them to know any of the violent details.

It was now the weekend, Harry had Quidditch practice tomorrow for the first game that was coming up between Slytherin and Gryffindor. He was looking forward to his first match, and hoped that it would be everything he thought it was.

Currently, he was searching for a room that he could practice his spells in. The incident with the troll had shown Harry just how much he needed to focus on offensive spells, had he been able to attack in a more direct manner he might not have gotten as injured as he did. As he walked down a hall in the western quadrant of the school, which was filled with abandoned rooms, he stopped, hearing grunts of exertion coming from behind one of the doors.

He made his way over and opened the door, and felt his jaw promptly widen. Inside was Tonks, doing what looked like some serious combat training. She was wearing a pair of sweat pants and a sleeveless shirt, glistening lightly with sweat. She was weaving between what looked like training dummies with animation charms on them. She dodged between imaginary spell fire, rolling and twirling around as she fired at the dummies who dodged her attacks

in turn, Harry could almost see the spells she would be moving through during her chaotic dance.

He watched for nearly fifteen minutes until she seemed to run out of energy, stopping the dummies as she huffed and tried to regain her breath, then he starting clapping.

Tonks whirled around to see him and he grinned at her, "that was incredible, Tonks."

Tonks looked somewhat embarrassed as she rubbed the back of her neck, "thanks, I practice a lot. Now, not to be rude or anything, but what are you doing here?"

"I was actually looking for a place to do exactly what you're doing," Harry said, shrugging his shoulders. "After nearly getting killed by a troll I realized that I need to step up my game, so I was hoping to find a good spot to practice offensive spells."

"So it's true?" Tonks breathed, "you really did kill a troll?"

Harry grimaced, "yeah, I was lucky though, had I been a tad slower it would have killed me." He shook his head and smoothly changed subjects, "so what are you training for?"

"I want to be an auror," Tonks said, it was the first time she had ever sounded so serious. Well, as serious as Tonks could sound at least.

"Those are like magical police men, right?" asked Harry, he had only a heard a little about aurors. They were members of an elite unit of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement of the Ministry of Magic trained to capture Dark wizards and witches. Auror training was supposed to be very difficult and intensive, so there were very few qualified applicants.

"There's a little more to it than that," Tonks said, "but essentially, yeah, that's what they are."

"So how's your training going then?" asked Harry.

Tonks sighed, "not as good as I hoped. I'm doing what I can, but without an actual partner I'm somewhat limited."

"Then it's a good thing I'm here, right?" asked Harry, flicking his wand out.

"What?"

"Stupefy!"

Tonks swore loudly as she dodged the fourth year spell. "What the hell, Potter!" she shouted, only to have to dodge another stunner.

"Come on, Tonks! You were just telling me you needed a partner to throw spells at you," Harry laughed, casting another stupefy. "Well, I need someone to practice the spells I'm learning on."

Tonks growled but there was a cheerful grin on her face, "fine then, let's see what you've got!"

Harry laughed, "alright, I haven't tried this one yet, but let's see you dodge this! Diffindo!"

XoX

As they entered November, the weather turned very cold. The mountains around the school became icy gray and the lake like chilled steel. Every morning the ground was covered in frost. Hagrid could be seen from the upstairs windows defrosting broomsticks on the Quidditch field, bundled up in a long moleskin overcoat, rabbit fur gloves, and enormous beaver-skin boots.

The Quidditch season had begun. On Saturday, Harry would be playing in his first match after weeks of training: Gryffindor versus Slytherin. If Gryffindor won, they would move up into second place in the house championship.

Hardly anyone had seen Harry play because Wood had decided that, as their secret weapon, Harry should be kept, well, secret. But the news that he was playing Seeker had leaked out somehow, so now on top of fighting trolls he was being hailed as a prodigal Quidditch player, people were already stating that he had been given several offers to various Quidditch teams, despite the fact that no one had even seen him play yet. It was things like this where he really hated his fame, and it was these thoughts that made his determination to

move out of the shadow his title the-boy-who-lived cast that much stronger.

With Wood constantly calling in last minute Quidditch practices and his new added on training with Tonks, his schedule was finally filled to the brim.

Harry learned that there were seven hundred ways of committing a Quidditch foul and that all of them had happened during a World Cup match in 1473; that Seekers were usually the smallest and fastest players, and that most serious Quidditch accidents seemed to happen to them; that although people rarely died playing Quidditch, referees had been known to vanish and turn up months later in the Sahara Desert.

"I think that's enough for today, Potter," Wood said after Harry had collected the Snitch again. They had been doing drills for several hours now, Wood would release the Snitch and Harry would catch it, they were trying to widdle down his time as much as possible. So far Harry's best time was ten minutes, fifty seconds.

"You're doing pretty well," he said as they made their way off the pitch. "Your times are short, but trying to catch a snitch alone and doing it when you're surrounded by teams trying to tear each others throats out is completely different."

Harry gave Wood a confident grin, "don't worry about me, I'll be fine." He looked back up front, "you'll see, we'll kick their arses so hard they'll turn inside out."

Wood laughed heartily, "well if you play in the game like you do in practice, then I don't doubt it." he placed a hand on Harry's shoulder as they stood outside the Gryffindor common room, "now get some rest, you're going to have a big day tomorrow."

"Right," they entered the through the portrait and Harry. He looked around, only a few sixth and seventh years were there at the moment, Neville and Hermione were most likely at the library with the others. He would join them but didn't want to have to walk all the way down to the library, just to walk back up again when they would likely be coming to the common room in a few minutes anyways.

He sank down onto one of the couches and pulled out a book, *So You Want to be an Animagus?* Through some serious negotiating he had managed to get this book from Professor McGonagall, claiming he had an academic interest in the Animagi ability after seeing her transform from a cat into a human during one of their classes when Ron had come late and she transformed before berating him for being tardy. He opened the page to the part where he had placed the marker and read:

The ability to become an Animagus is considered by many to be the ultimate form in Organic Transfiguration. Unlike normal human transfiguring this requires an innate understanding of the animal you represent most, understanding its skeletal and muscular structure so that you can become that animal, rather than just transfigure yourself into one.

The first step towards becoming an animagus is finding out what your animal is. Your animal form is determined by a number of traits and characteristics that you embody, things like hair color and body type are some of the determining factors. Also, your mental disposition will be a large factor in what your animal will be, emotions that you feel most like love, anger, humor, and the emotional traits that you embody like loyalty, courage, chivalry, honor, cunning, and intelligence are all determining factors for what your animal form is.

There are two ways to discover your form, the easiest and most used way is to take a potion that will put you to sleep and automatically align your mind to that of your animal via dreams. The harder way is to meditate on the traits that you embody and study the possible animals you may be based on those traits, often time this form of discovering what animal you are lasts several years simply to discover your form and is why most witches and wizards use the potion. Some however, claim that discovering your form through meditation allows you to better connect with your form though no differences have ever been recorded.

He continued on to read that becoming an animagus required the ability to do self-transfiguration, which was the highest level of organic transfiguration possible. It would take a lot of effort for him to accomplish this before the end of the year, but if he could gain this ability it would be so worth it.

"What are you reading?"

"Gah!" Harry had been so focused on his reading that when the voice came from behind him, he tried to spin around, only to fall off the couch. He looked up to see the Weasley twins laughing at him.

"Yeah, go on, laugh it up you two," Harry stood back up. "Just wait until I prank you into oblivion."

"Do you think that was a challenge he just issued dear brother?" asked George.

"I do believe it was," said Fred.

"Do you think we should take him up on it?"

"Hmm... I don't know, we haven't seen him do anything worthwhile in the pranking department yet."

"Still, he's pretty good at magic, or so I hear."

"That is true, but you know it takes more than magic to be pranksters like us."

"Perhaps we should wait until he has proven himself a worthy opponent."

"Yes, I believe your right."

"Could you two please stop doing that?" Harry groaned, his head was spinning from watching them play ping pong with their words.

Fred and George looked from Harry, to each other, then back to Harry and in that eerie way that only they can do, said, "Do what?" in complete unison.

"That," Harry growled, "that double speak thing, it's giving me a head ache." He then paused and looked at the two curiously, "how do you do that anyways?"

Fred smirked, "now, you know we can't tell you that Harrikins."

"Fred's right," added George, "that's our trade secret."

"Ugh, just forget it," Harry mumbled, "you two are giving me a headache."

Harry was grateful when Neville and Hermione arrived a few seconds later to save him from the two who obviously took great pride in giving him a headache, or he may have gone insane.

XoX

The next morning dawned very bright and cold. The Great Hall was full of the delicious smell of fried sausages and the cheer full chatter of everyone looking forward to a good Quidditch match.

Harry yawned widely as he sat down in between Susan and Neville. "Good morning," he said to them.

"You look tired," Susan said.

"Do I?" Harry asked with a small half grin. "You do know that a yawn is from a lack of oxygen to the brain, not from actually being tired, right?"

"Er, no, I didn't," Susan said in a small voice, her face coloring a little.

Harry winked at her, "well now you do. Remember, I'm a bundle of indeterminable energy, I never truly tire. Some liken me to the energizer bunny."

The only person who laughed at that was Hermione, who nearly squirt some of the pumpkin juice she was drinking out of her nose.

"What's an energizer bunny?" asked Hannah, blinking in confusion as she looked at the raven haired boy.

"Muggle term," Harry sighed, "it's a rabbit that plays drums on a commercial for batteries."

"Batteries?"

"Never mind," Harry mumbled, deciding it would be better to just eat so he wouldn't make a fool of himself anymore than he already had.

"So are you ready for your game?" asked Neville.

Harry finished chewing and swallowing his bite of sausage and eggs, then grinned and said, "of course. I can't wait to start playing."

"Do you think Gryffindor will win?"

Harry opened his mouth, then paused, thinking things through before answering. "I don't know, I suppose it depends on how good their players compared to our players, and I have no clue how I stack against their Seeker. It could go either way I suppose."

"No, no, no that's not what you're supposed to say."

Harry turned to look at Tracey Davis, who had just joined the table and was surprisingly enough, wearing Gryffindor colored clothing, red pants and a red sweat shirt with gold trim and the words "Go Harry!" in gold across her chest.

"Hey Trace," Harry greeted, "what's up with the clothes? Not that I'm complaining of course, red and gold suit you."

"You think so?" Tracey grinned, looking down at herself. "I suppose I do look pretty good in these, of course, I look good in everything."

"Right," Harry rolled his eyes at his friend, Tracey was easily the most outgoing person he had ever met. She never seemed to have a lack of confidence, especially once she had become more comfortable with him and his other friends. "That still doesn't tell me why your wearing them."

"Well, Malfoy was bragging about how Slytherin was going to pound you into the ground today. Naturally, I made a bet that you guys would win, so I need you to have confidence in yourself."

"You bet against your own team? And on Gryffindor?" asked Hannah in a shocked voice that someone would bet against their own house losing. Meanwhile, Harry looked over at the Slytherin table to see Daphne pinching the bridge of her nose and shaking her head, while Blaise looked like his face was trying to decide between whether or not he was amused or consternated.



He interrupted Hannah's rant about house loyalty and pride to Tracey, saying, "Trace, you are the craziest girl I have ever met."

Tracey looked at him with a large grin, "I know."

"Well, I just wanted to let you know in case you didn't."

XoX

By eleven o'clock the whole school seemed to be out in the stands around the Quidditch pitch. Many students had binoculars. The seats might be raised high in the air, but it was still difficult to see what was going on sometimes.

Tracey, and surprisingly enough Blaise and Daphne were sitting with Hermione, Neville, Hannah and Susan over in the West Ham fan up in the top row. As a surprise for Harry, they had painted a large banner on a sheet they had scrounged from somewhere. It said Potter for President, and Tracey, who turned out had a talent for painting, had done a large golden Gryffindor lion underneath. Then Hermione had performed a tricky little charm so that the paint flashed different colors.

Meanwhile, in the locker room, Harry and the rest of the team were changing into their scarlet Quidditch robes (Slytherin would be playing in green).

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

"Okay, men," he said.

"And women," said Chaser Angelina Johnson. Angelina was a tall black witch with brown eyes and had her hair done up in a braid. She was very physically attractive, with a toned body due to all of the training she did for her position as one of their chasers.

"And women," Wood agreed. "This is it."

"The big one," said Fred Weasley.

"The one we've all been waiting for," added George.

"We know Oliver's speech by heart," Fred told Harry, "we were on the team last year."

"Shut up, you two," said Wood. "This is the best team Gryffindor's had in years. We're going to win. I know it." He glared at them all as if to say, "Or else."

"Right. It's time. Good luck, all of you." Harry followed Fred and George out of the locker room. He could feel adrenaline begin to pump through his veins as he walked out of the locker room and into the large cheers of the students.

Madam Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the middle of the field waiting for the two teams, her broom in her hand.

"Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you," she said, once they were all gathered around her. Harry noticed that she seemed to be speaking particularly to the Slytherin Captain, Marcus Flint, a sixth year. Harry thought Flint looked as if he had some troll blood in him. Maybe that troll he had killed was Flints uncle who had come for a visit?

The thought amused him but he soon shook the thought from his head and refocused his attention.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the fluttering banner high above, flashing Potter for President over the crowd. He couldn't help but chuckle a bit.

"Mount your brooms, please." Harry smoothly slid onto his broom as if he had been flying his whole life.

Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle.

Fifteen brooms rose up, high, high into the air. They were off.

"And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor – what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive, too –"

"JORDAN!"

"Sorry, Professor." The Weasley twins' friend, Lee Jordan, was doing the commentary for the match, closely watched by Professor McGonagall.

"And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve – back to Johnson and – no, the Slytherins have taken the Quaffle, Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes – what's this? Harry Potter has disrupted the Slytherins play! He snatches the Quaffle and passes it to Johnson who passes it to Alicia, score one for Gryffindor! An unbelievable play, it looks like Wood chose right when he placed Harry Potter in the Seeker position."

Harry began flying around to look for the snitch and keep an eye on the game at the same time. Once he had started practice he had read several books on Quidditch and a book that showed several professional plays and moves that had been done in several past games. He wanted to do well, his father had often talked about how fun Quidditch had been when he had taken Harry flying, and Harry wanted to make him proud by being the best Seeker there was.

He noticed that Terrence Higgs, the Slytherin Seeker, was following him. Grinning, Harry put on a burst of speed. He looked over his shoulder to see Higgs was following him and began to make his movements as erratic as possible making it look like he was chasing the Snitch.

"It looks like Potters seen something, could it be the snitch! Higgs is right behind Potter, following doggedly, it looks like the Snitch has indeed been spotted and – SWEET MERLIN ON A PIKE! Potter just pulled up and Higgs is left to get a face-full of dirt! Harry Potter has just shown a textbook Wronski Feint! And the greasy little slime ball Higgs is left right where these snakes belong, slithering around on the dirt!"

"JORDAN!"

"Er, right, sorry Professor."

Harry looked over at Wood, who was positively beaming and grinned. He shot back up into the air and decided to start looking for the Snitch for real, now that Higgs would be out of the game for a

while. As he was circling the pitch, his broom gave a sudden lurch. Harry frowned as he tightened his hold on the broom, wondering if it might be malfunctioning.

It happened again. It was as though the broom was trying to buck him off. But Nimbus Two Thousands did not suddenly decide to buck their riders off. He had looked over the specifications for this broom, it was the best one out there right now, bar none. There was no way it could be malfunctioning after only flying it a few dozen times.

Harry tried to turn back toward the Gryffindor goal – posts – he had half a mind to ask Wood to call time – out – and then he realized that his broom was completely out of his control. He couldn't turn it. He couldn't direct it at all. It was zigzagging through the air, and every now and then making violent swishing movements that almost unseated him.

Lee was still commentating.

"Slytherin in possession – Flint with the Quaffle – passes Spinnet – passes Bell – hit hard in the face by a Bludger, hope it broke his nose – only joking, Professor – Slytherins score – A no..."

The Slytherins were cheering. No one seemed to have noticed that Harry's broom was behaving strangely. It was carrying – him slowly higher, away from the game, jerking and twitching as it went. Harry growled as he wondered what the hell was going on.

Suddenly, people began to notice Harry and were pointing up at him all over the stands. His broom had started to roll over and over, with him only just managing to hold on. Then the whole crowd gasped. Harry's broom had given a wild jerk and Harry swung off it. He was now dangling from it, holding on with only one hand.

Harry felt a growl in his throat as he reached out with his magic to find out what was wrong with his broom and felt someone else's surrounding it. He let loose, his magic burst from him in a tightly controlled, yet violent manner. He ruthlessly crushed the other persons control with impunity, over in the stands Professor Quirrel gave out a yelp that was blocked out by the crowd's cheering.

A great heave later and Harry swung himself back onto his broom and was off like a shot.

"And it looks like Potters back in the game, I wonder what was up with his broom? Flint has the Quaffle, he dodges a Bludger from Fred, or is that George? Passes by Angelina – tosses it to – Potter intercepts! Potter intercepts the Quaffle and passes it to Bell! Bell goes in and shoots – no – she fakes and passes it to Spinnet who shoots – score for Gryffindor!"

Harry flew like a demon possessed as he broke up several of the Slytherin's plays. Someone had taken control of his broom; he felt humiliated, he needed to regain his standing, he needed to let people know he belonged on this team, that he had earned his place here. More importantly, he needed to let himself know that.

While Harry no longer had the anger issues he used to as a child, one of the things that he did have was a competitive streak a mile wide. He had always enjoyed competitions, pushing himself to his absolute limit against other opponents. Whether it was Sparring or playing Football. Likely because of his competitive nature, the best way to anger Harry was to cheat.

Whether someone actually had been screwing with his broom so Slytherin would win was irrelevant, it was the principle of the matter that counted.

As he finished breaking up another play he saw a flash of gold over by the Slytherin goal posts. The Snitch!

He was off, barreling straight through another of the Slytherins plays, though not on purpose this time. Thanks to his training with Master Wei, when the diminutive man would throw several balls at him blindfolded while he dodged, Harry could sense the Bludger behind him, coming up fast.

He barrel rolled, letting the Bludger sail through the spot where he had been previously and there was a split second where he was upside down before righting himself. He let instincts take over now as he focused entirely on the Snitch, reacting without thinking as he dodged Bludgers and people alike.

The Snitch tried to shoot away as Harry came towards it but he followed doggedly, staying on its tail through several sharp twists and turns. He heard Lee's cry of 'POTTERS SEEN THE SNITCH!' but ignored it as the small golden ball flitted off to the left with a feint and then going right, but Harry had anticipated this and shot his hand into the air.

He corkscrewed around and held out his hand, which held the Snitch, fluttering its wings as it still tried to break away.

"Potters got the Snitch! GRYFFINDOR WINS!"

Harry grinned as he floated around for several seconds, holding the snitch high in the air before heading back down. He was immediately lifted into a grisly bear hug by Oliver who was laughing, crying and shouting 'we win!' to the heavens. Suddenly he was being passed around as he received slaps on the back from the Twins and hugs and kisses on the cheek by Katie Bell and Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet respectively.

"I can't believe it!" Oliver continued, even after they were all dressed back into their robes. "I don't think I've ever seen someone play Seeker like you! Forget Charley Weasley, you're going to be the next Eunice Murray!"

"With you on our team there's no way we won't get the Cup this year," said Angelina.

"Harry! Old pal, old friend, old mate, you were brilliant!" added Fred, placing an arm around Harry's shoulder.

"I concur," added George, "best damn Seeking I have never seen!"

Harry scratched the back of his neck as he grinned. "I guess I was pretty good huh?"

"Pretty good," Katie snorted in a very un-lady like manner. "That's like saying Josef Wronski was a decent player, or the Holyhead Harpies are only just ok. I've watched a lot of Quidditch in my time, and some of those moves you pulled off were almost of professional quality."

Harry blushed, it was one of the few times he had ever felt embarrassed. He usually handled compliments pretty well, accepting them with some blasé and then moving on, but they were beginning to lay it thick enough that even he couldn't just accept it and ignore it. Though he certainly wouldn't deny that the compliments felt good.

XoX

Later that day Harry was sitting in Hagrids with several of his friends, Tracey was hugging the life out of him with glee, while the others watched on in amusement.

"I can't thank you enough!" she shouted, ignoring the small fact that Harry was starting to turn purple from a lack of oxygen. "Now Malfoy has to be my slave for a week! And he can't even back out of it thanks to the wizarding oath we took! Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"No...problem," Harry gasped.

Daphne sighed and pulled them apart, "while I personally don't care if he dies, I'm sure you do, so you might want to stop choking him."

Tracey let go and looked sheepish while Harry hacked and coughed from where he had fallen on the ground.

"Thanks Daph," he said hoarsely.

Daphne scowled at him, "don't call me Daph!"

Before Harry could begin teasing her (The last time he did she got them kicked out of the library by jumping on him and making them tip over a book shelf), Hermione changed the subject.

"So what happened to your broom?" she asked.

Harry blinked at her, "Huh? My broom? Oh!" he chuckled a bit, "right, well, I'm sure you all saw what happened. When I felt the broom with my magic there was another signature on it." seeing their blank looks he said, "someone had jinxed my broom."

"I knew it!" Hermione said suddenly. "Brooms don't just go out of control like that, and yours is not only brand new but a top-of-the-line model. I read the specifications for a Nimbus two thousand and there's no way it could have malfunctioned on its own."

"Please don't get into this again," Tracey groaned.

"Get into what?" asked Harry.

"Little Miss bookworm here thinks Professor Snape was jinxing your broom," Tracey said, hooking a thumb over at Hermione.

Hermione scowled, "he was, I saw it, he was chanting under his breath and wasn't breaking eye contact."

"Now, Hermione," Hagrid said placating. "Professor Snape's a teacher, 'e wouldn't jinx no broom."

"But he hates Harry!" Hermione exclaimed, "he was always being unfair in class, and he sneers at him and always asks him questions that aren't in the course curriculum."

"That is true," Blaise said slowly, bringing a rare bit of attention to himself. "But I still wouldn't believe it was him, after all, he would naturally be the first person they suspected for that exact reason."

"I don't think it really matters who did it," said Harry.

"But what if they do it again?" asked Hermione.

Harry shook his head, "I doubt they would. The teachers were all there and they'll likely be on guard for this sort of thing." He shrugged, "besides, it's nothing I can't handle."

"Speaking of Professor Snape," Tracey said. She looked over at Harry, "I was actually coming to visit you as I heard you were in the hospital, when I saw him limping down the corridor from the hospital wing the day after the Halloween feast when the troll attacked. He had bandages wrapped around his leg and he was looking pretty pale, like he had lost a lot of blood or something."

Harry looked over at Hagrid to see the man had gotten suddenly nervous, he wondered if Snape had tried to get past the giant



Cerberus. But what reason could he have to do that? Was what the dog was guarding really that valuable? Something important enough that a teacher might actually be trying to steal it?

XoX

The next morning the Great Hall was introduced to a rather funny sight of Draco Malfoy wearing what looked like the wizards version of a Butlers uniform, serving fruits to a very satisfied Tracey Davis. Many of the teachers were watching the scene in a mixture of shock, amusement, or in Snape's case, anger; while all of the students, including some of the Slytherins, laughed.

"Do you think you can get him to pour me some more tea?" asked Harry, who after seeing this sight just had to sit with Tracey at the Slytherins table.

"Of course!" Tracey said in a bright and cheerful voice. "Draco, be a dear and pour my friend Harry some tea, I owe him for winning the game after all."

"I like my tea with two spoons of milk and a teaspoon of honey," added Harry as Malfoy grumbled insults and threats under his breath as he poured some tea that the house elves had provided into Harry's goblet.

"You know, some of those words you're using are quite rude," said Harry. "Perhaps you should give him some form of punishment Tracey?"

"Yes, I believe your right," Tracey tapped her chin and hummed in thought. "Draco, I will not tolerate your bad mouthing of my friend. As punishment you are to stand on the table and spin around while singing I'm a little wizard."

Malfoy tried to tell Tracey to shove off, but his magic had been bound by a wizard's oath and forced him onto the Slytherin table where he placed his hands above his head and began to spin. His face took on the same red hue of a Weasley's hair as he sung what Harry assumed could only be the Wizard version of 'I'm a Little Tea Pot' in front of the entire Great Hall.

XoX

The rest of the day went great, no one could keep a smile off their face, even after hearing a boring lecture from Professor Binns on the Goblin Rebellion, thanks to this morning's performance. Even McGonagall seemed to have an odd mischievous glint in her eyes, or maybe it was a reflection of the light, during class.

"I want those essays on my desk next Monday at the beginning of class," Professor McGonagall told everyone as they packed up. "Oh, and Mr. Potter, may I have a moment?"

Harry looked at his four friends in the class and shrugged, "I'll see you guys at Dinner." He made his way over to Professor McGonagall and stood in front of her, waiting for her to tell him about whatever it was she wanted to talk about.

"Follow me," she said, walking off. Harry blinked before hurrying up and falling into step with her.

"Something up, Professor?" he asked, wondering where they were going as she led him through a hall, down a stair case and through several corridors.

"I told the other teachers your suggestion for a common room that would belong to all of the houses," Professor McGonagall started. "They all agreed that it was a brilliant idea, and decided to pool our talents together in an effort to help you."

"You mean you managed to make the clubhouse?" asked Harry, excited; he had not thought they would have been able to make one so fast. Then again, with magic he supposed anything was possible.

"We have," Professor McGonagall said, stopping in front of a door and opening it. Harry stepped through and promptly gaped at the sight before him.

The entire place looked like something right out of a fantasy story. The room was large, easily twice the size of the Gryffindor common room, done in a cylindrical shape. On one side was a large fireplace that was roaring away merrily, with several couches and chairs around it and a few tables that had wizard chess sets on them. To the left were several book shelves, they were a little bare but Harry figured it was so the students could put their favorite books there for

everyone to read. Next to the book shelf's were six sets of tables that could seat a total of six students, obviously for homework and studying. On the other side was a large, soft rug that was set with several low coffee tables for playing games. All in all, it was...

"Perfect," said Harry.

Professor McGonagall smiled, "I thought so too. Do you have the list of rules with you?"

"Uh huh," Harry said, reaching into his book bag and pulling out a long parchment. He handed it over to Professor McGonagall.

"I'll take a look through this, just to make sure there is nothing that you might have missed," said Professor McGonagall. "Then we can go and see Filius about charming the rules for the room."

"Great," said Harry, feeling somewhat dazed. "Thank you."

McGonagall offered a rare smile to the person who was becoming her favorite student, "you're welcome, Harry."

XoX

I've had a few people make suggestions that I begin making more dramatic changes to the storyline because they feel my story is more or less canon with a stronger Harry Potter. Right now, I will not deny that there are not that many differences from the canon story to this one. However I do have a reason for that. If you read my summery on the first chapter, then you would know that the only really significant change I made was that Harry Potter has eidetic memory. This means that the only person who can change the timeline is Harry Potter, everyone else will act exactly as they would normally because there is nothing about them that I have changed. What this means is that Voldemort is still trying to regain his body, Dumbledore isn't really doing anything that he wouldn't do in the original timeline, and the only people who really change are those who have been affected by Harry.

Change is always gradual, you can't just start making all of these significant differences in the timeline without a good reason. You also have to think about how this change is going to affect the original timeline, the more changes you make, the harder it is to

predict what will happen further in the story. Changing the timeline is a lot harder than it looks and should only be done when you have thought out what is going to happen when you make this change.

For instance, Harry Potter has befriended not just Hermione and Neville, but also Hannah Abbott, Susan Bones, Tracey Davis, Blaise Zabini, Nymphadora Tonks, The Weasley Twins, and in this last chapter has been joined by Padme Patil, Lisa Turpin and Terry Boot. Now, while this doesn't seem like a very significant change right now, later on in the story this will cause a dramatic change in the future. If you need an example think of it like this, how different would it have been if Harry had befriended more than just Ron and Hermione before his name was placed in the Tri-Wizard cup?

Another example is the All-House Common Room, this doesn't seem very significant, but that's just because its being used to foreshadow events (for the sake of the story, I won't tell you what those events are).

And last, the reason all these changes happened, Harry Potter is stronger than his canon counterpart. Stronger, Smarter, more determined to make a name for himself and move out of the shadow his title cast. Right now, the story is more or less starting, Harry is still learning about the wizarding world in general and his place in it. However, you can be sure that once Harry is ready, more changes will be made to the story.

So, just be patient, we still have somewhere around 145 something chapters left before this story ends (I've only written book 1).

## Chapter 8: Revealing Your Inner Animagus

XoX

"Wotcher, Harry! What are you doing?"

Harry turned around where he had just finished posting his note on the bulletin board announcing the 'Common Room for all Houses' to see Tonks looking at it over his shoulder. "Wotcher Tonks! Just posting a message up on the bulletin board," replied Harry.

"The Common Room for all Houses, a place where everyone regardless of age, gender or house can come to study, play games or just hang out," Tonks read out loud. "The room is located in the West Wing, on the fourth floor, corridor three, third door on the right. All students who wish to be allowed inside must sign their name on the chalk board near the door that will magically bind all students into following the rules, so as to ensure that there is no violence or arguing while in the common room. For more questions, ask either your Head of House or Harry Potter."

She blinked several times before turning to Harry with a grin. "Been busy much?" she asked in a slightly dry tone that belied her obvious amusement.

Harry shrugged, "Madame Pince won't let my friends and I in the library, says were getting too big. And something about clumsy aurors-in-training ruining her books."

Tonks blushed and replied in a mock angry voice, "That was only one time! Just one!" Her shoulders slumped and she mumbled, "I swear, she'll never let me live that down."

The incident in question happened last week, Tonks had come in to grab a book for her studies and stopped by Harry's ever growing group to say hi. She had ended up tripping over her feet, smashing into a book case, grabbing one of the books and ended up ripping the bindings off. It had been fixed with a simple reparo charm, but Madame Pince had kicked Tonks out faster than you could say "golden snitch."

"There, there Nymphadora," Harry said, patting her shoulder mockingly.

"Don't call me that!" Tonks growled. "Where did you find out my name anyways? Who told you?"

"Told me?" questioned Harry, snorting at the very thought at someone actually having the guts to tell him that. "No one told me your first name Tonks, whenever I asked your fellow Puffs they all said 'don't ever ask me questions like that about she-who-shall-not-be-called-by-her-first-name'. Congratulations by the way, your moniker has more hyphens then mine and Moldywarts put together."

Tonks choked back a laugh at the way Harry made fun of the Darkest Lord of the century and his hatred of wizarding titles. "So how'd you learn my name then?" she asked, curiously this time.

"School registry," Harry answered with a shrug. He swiftly turned around and entered the Great Hall for Breakfast, leaving a gaping Tonks behind.

"Good morning, Padma," Harry said as he sat down at the Ravenclaw table. "Terry, Lisa," he nodded to the other two in greeting as well. Lisa Turpin was a blond girl about two heads shorter than Harry, she had light grayish eyes and lightly tanned skin. She wasn't very talkative most of the time, but unfailingly polite to just about everyone, a disposition that had been crafted by her family. She was a pureblood, one of those considered "light side families" because of their alignment during the wars against Voldemort and Grendelwald.

Terry was also a pureblood, but had brown hair and dark brown, almost black eyes. He wasn't very talkative either, except for when you said something that he was either enthusiastic about, like Quidditch, or that he contested. After Gryffindor's match against Slytherin all he had talked about were the moves Harry pulled off.

"Good morning, Harry," Padma greeted as the other two tossed in their own greetings as well. Padma like her sister was an attractive witch with long black hair and of Indian descent. Like Parvati she wore her hair in a plait, making it so that the only way you could tell the two apart was her uniform.

"Did you finish your potions essay?" asked Harry. He had been helping Padma the other day in her potions, the only subject she

was really bad at, bad being relative since she was still better than most of the people in the other houses but worse than the other students of her own house, the other day but they had not been able to finish before Harry had to leave for Quidditch practice.

"Yes," she said happily, "thanks for your help by the way. I would have never gotten some of those lines down had you not mentioned them."

Harry shrugged, "I'm sure one of the older Ravenclaws could have helped too, but you're welcome."

Harry piled some eggs and toast onto his plate, then grabbed the cup on his left and drank the hot tea that the House elves had replaced his pumpkin juice with. Honestly, pumpkin juice may be good every now and then, but how anyone could drink it in the morning was beyond him.

"Is that tea?" asked Lisa, who was sitting on his left.

"Yes," said Harry, taking a small sip and sighing in relief, he always loved drinking tea in the morning. "With just a tad bit of milk and some honey to be precise."

"How come you have tea while the rest of us are drinking pumpkin juice?" asked Padma curiously, and if she were honest a tad jealously.

"Because I went to the kitchen and asked the house elves to make me tea instead," answered Harry.

"You know where the kitchen is?" asked Terry Boot, seeming to gain interest in the topic.

"Mmhmm."

"Can you tell me?"

Harry gave him a lazy grin as he took a slow sip of tea. "Maybe," he said.

Before Terry could complain about Harry keeping something like the location of the Kitchen a secret from him Hermione, Neville, Susan

and Hannah all came to sit over by them. Blaise, Daphne and Tracey soon came in, Tracey gave Harry a smile and a wave before following her two friends over to the Slytherin table. He waved back; he still had yet to convince them to sit with him and his other friends but felt he was getting closer to achieving that goal.

Conversation shifted after that as they spoke of school, homework, sports and whatever else took their fancy. Harry was listening to Neville talking about some of the plants he was hoping to grow when he got home when a voice spoke up behind him.

"Potter, I had some questions about this 'Common Room' of yours."

Harry bent backwards slightly to see a girl who looked to be in her third or fourth year, with brown hair and blue eyes, a bit of an odd combination but he couldn't help but think she was rather pretty.

"Sure," he smiled at her and turned around, as amusing as it was to see someone upside down, it would be distracting if he was going to answer some questions. "What do you want to know?"

"Thanks," The girl replied with a smile, holding out her hand. "My name's Elena Turpin, by the way."

Harry smiled and kissed the back of her hand, "Pleased to meet you. You're Lisa's older sister then?"

Elena gained a light rosy tint to her cheeks as his lips touched her hand but shook it off quickly enough. "Yes, I am," she said, looking over at her sister for a moment, who was scowling at her a bit. She smirked before turning her attention to Harry. "Anyways, I was hoping you could tell me exactly what this common room is for?"

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, it seemed pretty straight forward to him. Then again, it was his brainchild so it probably would make more sense to him than others.

"I mean, what do you hope to accomplish with this? What's its purpose?" Harry frowned, he had thought that would be obvious, especially for someone who was held in the house of intelligence.

"I'm sure you've seen how I often times sit at other tables besides the Gryffindor one, right?" he asked, getting a nod from Elena. "Well,



that's because I'm friends with people who are in other houses, and the only place I can spend time with them is the Great Hall during meal times, and the library."

"However, the Great Hall is usually for eating and you can't really talk in the library," Elena finished, looking embarrassed that she hadn't figured it out sooner. "I guess that makes sense."

"Yes, though there is another reason," Harry added.

Elena perked up, "Oh?"

Harry nodded, "The four houses have been divided for a long time, ever since the rift between Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor from what I've read. But at one point in time, the four houses were much more united, only divided by their traits, not their ideals and beliefs in their own house's superiority."

"So you want others to use this common room as a way spend time with students from other houses to promote inter-house unity?" Elena finished slowly.

"Exactly," Harry said simply.

Elena looked thoughtful as she said, "You know, that's a really good idea. I wonder why no one's thought of it sooner?"

"Who knows," Harry shrugged, he had stopped asking himself that and just chalked it up to wizarding laziness.

"Thanks for answering my questions," she said.

"Not at all, I hope to see you at the common room," Harry replied easily.

"Of course, I'm looking forward to checking it out," Elena smiled before walking off with a small blush on her face.

"She seems nice," Harry noted absently.

"That's just because you don't live with her," Lisa mumbled dejectedly.

Harry grinned, "She can't be that bad."

"You're not related to her," Lisa said a tad dryly. Harry supposed that was true, he had often heard of how most siblings rarely got along, Padma and Parvati being the only ones he knew of. He had read that siblings often formed rivalries and he had no doubt that Lisa had one with her sister.

XoX

Classes began soon after breakfast and Harry breezed through them, his mind was more focused on his animagus potion than his classes. It was almost ready; he suspected it would be finished sometime next month.

After classes he made his way over to Hagrid's hut, alone after having promised to meet his friends after dinner so he could show them all the common room. He knocked on the hut several times, hearing Hagrid's standard 'back, Fang!' before the door opened.

"Arry!" Hagrid said in surprise. "I wa'n't expectin' ter see yeh today."

"I know, I'm sorry for just dropping in on you unannounced like this," Harry apologized.

"Oh it's no trouble, no trouble at all," Hagrid replied, waving off his apology. "What can I do fer yeh?"

"Well I was hoping you could answer a question for me," Harry said carefully. "I believe you have the expertise I need in this subject."

"O' course I can! Go a'ead and ask," said Hagrid, seeming happy to help.

"I was wondering the third floor corridor when I came across a room that was locked. Curious, I unlocked the room and opened it, only to find a Cerberus inside."

Hagrid gasped, "yeh found Fluffy!"

Harry opened his mouth, then slowly closed it and blinked. "Fluffy?" he croaked, what kind of person names a three headed dog Fluffy?

"Er, never you mind that," Hagrid said quickly. "What were yeh doin' in the third floor corridor, it's forbidden!"

"Actually Professor Dumbledore just said it's off limits to whoever doesn't wish to die a painful death," Harry quoted. "But that's beside the point, the point is, I found the dog standing over a trap door. Meaning it's guarding something. What's it guarding?" he asked in as blunt a way as possible. Hagrid, while extremely kind and friendly, was not all that bright. Harry knew that simply by asking this question, the half-giant was likely to let something slip. He felt kind of bad for doing this, but his curiosity had to be satisfied.

"Now don't yeh go snooping around 'arry," Hagrid said. "It's dangerous and you forget that dog, an' you forget what it's guardin', that's between Professor Dumbledore an' Nicolas Flamel!" He then paled as realized what he had said, "I shouldn't a' said that."

Harry nodded and looked contrite, "I see, I'm sorry, I'll do my best to pretend I never saw it." However, while he may have said that out loud, his mind worked on analyzing the name. He had heard that name only once before, on the card he had gotten during his trip on the Hogwarts Express. But that begged the question, what did a famous alchemist have that would need a guard like Fluffy? And why was it being guarded here? Where children were more than likely to stumble across it?

He would need to do more research.

XoX

Christmas was coming. One morning in mid-December, Hogwarts woke to find itself covered in several feet of snow. The lake froze solid and the Weasley twins were punished for bewitching several snowballs so that they followed Quirrel around, bouncing off the back of his turban. The few owls that managed to battle their way through the stormy sky to deliver mail had to be nursed back to health by Hagrid before they could fly off again.

No one could wait for the holidays to start. While the Gryffindor common room and the Great Hall had roaring fires, the drafty corridors had become icy and a bitter wind rattled the windows in the classrooms.

Worst of all were Professor Snape's classes down in the dungeons, where their breath rose in a mist before them and they kept as close as possible to their hot cauldrons.

Thankfully for an ever growing group that hung out with Harry, the newly dubbed 'Common Room for all Houses' was completely warm and comfortable, having been charmed and warded by the Hogwarts professors. Every student had read the notice and seen the note Harry had put up, and being curious, students from every house (only a few beside Blaise, Daphne and Tracey came from Slytherin) had come to check the place out. Within just a day the common room had become one of the most popular places to spend time, and more and more people would go there when they had free time.

It currently had many students, mostly first and second years, but also several students from the older years, in it. Some were lounging on the comfortable and elegant looking couches as they talked in front of the fire, others were playing games of wizards chess, some were studying or doing their homework and still a few were playing card games on the coffee tables over the rug.

"Hit me," said Tonks as she looked at her cards carefully she placed two down on the table. Harry kept his poker face on as Dean Thomas dealt her two cards, such a feat was rather hard when the girls hair kept changing from red to pink as she looked at the cards she had on hand. It was a rather amusing sight and he still hadn't quite gotten over watching her hair change colors.

Harry had been going up to some of the muggle-born students around school trying to get donations for the common room and had received a few decks of cards and some poker chips. He had promptly used a duplicating spell for the chips and cards and began the task, with the help of some of the muggle-born students, of teaching the purebloods poker.

The people who were playing right now were him, Tonks, a somewhat pompous first year Hufflepuff named Ernie MacMallin and Lee Jordan with Dean as the dealer.

When Dean turned to Harry he shook his head, "I'm good." And he did have a good hand, a jack, a queen, a king, an ace and a joker, all in hearts. It was easily his best hand he had gotten in the whole game, a game that he had been winning for the last three pots

thanks to his phenomenal poker face and ability to read the other players.

"Ok, show your hand," ordered Dean.

"Hey, I think I've got a pretty good pair," said Tonks cheerfully as she showed her hand. She had a fairly decent hand, three fours and two jacks. Ernie had four of a kind in threes and Lee had a full house.

"Looks like I beat you Tonks," Lee said with a winning smile as he showed his hand.

"And it looks like I beat you," said Harry, grinning as he showed his.

"I can't believe it," Ernie complained. "This game is stupid."

"Now don't be upset just because you lost," Harry said with a grin as he raked in the pot. These kids were so lucky they weren't playing for keeps or they'd have been cleaned out. "So who wants to go another round?" he chuckled at the accompanying groans that he got.

"So what plans do you all have for Christmas?" asked Tonks as she was dealt another hand.

"I'm likely going to be spending time with family at our vacation home in Florence," said Ernie, a slightly arrogant tone in his voice as he looked at his cards.

"I'll be spending my Christmas with my parents and sister," said Dean, "Its what I do every year and I reckon that's what I'll do this year as well."

"What about you, Harry?" asked Tonks.

Harry gave a fond smile as he set down three cards and received another three, "Just going to spend some time with a good friend I haven't seen since I started Hogwarts." He looked up to see Tonks and the others giving him a quizzical look and shrugged, "You?"

"I'm going to be spending time with my mum and dad," Tonks shrugged. "They're kinda boring and straight-laced, being barristers and all, but at least mum knows how to cook a mean spag-bol."

They played several more hands (Harry won most of them) before Harry called out.

"What? But it's still early!" Tonks complained, loudly.

"I know, but I have something I need to do today," said Harry. "Anyways, I'll see you all later," he looked at Tonks and mouthed 'see you in the usual spot' when the others weren't looking. She gave him a grin and suggestive wink, but Harry just rolled his eyes and began walking. Once Tonks had gotten comfortable with him he had found that she enjoyed teasing him with suggestive looks, he had gotten used to it by now though.

As Harry walked through the castle he wondered about the wisdom in Dumbledore's decision to hide the Philosopher's Stone at Hogwarts. It had been easy enough for him to determine what had been hidden beneath the trap door once Hagrid mentioned Nicholas Flamel. After searching through many books for information on the man, he had found it in Hogwarts, a History, in one of the chapters he hadn't read yet. Nicholas was a well-known alchemist and the only known maker of the Philosopher's Stone, naturally it hadn't been hard to figure out what the Cerberus was guarding after he learned that. And if Harry could figure out what was there, then others could as well.

"The ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Philosopher's Stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The Stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal."

Harry had read as much as he could find on the famed stone, and though there were no text on how to make one, he had been able to easily tell that the ability to create it would be considered the height of alchemy. Naturally something that no one except Flamel himself knew how to create would be an irresistible target, and now that target was within Hogwarts.

Someone had already tried to steal the stone once, and Harry suspected they would likely try again if they had not already. All they had to do was sneak into Hogwarts, which was easier than it looked so long as you knew how. There might be wards around the school that protected it from threats, but no one would suspect someone

walking in through the front door disguised as a student or teacher. It would be all too easy to get the Philosophers stone so long as they could do that and get passed the Cerberus and whatever other traps lay in wait.

Entering his dorm Harry opened the fourth compartment of his trunk, this one had a ladder that he walked down. The inside of this looked much like a library and apothecary; there were several shelves lined with various potion ingredients and books that he felt would be useful. Everything from ingredients like wolfsbane, asphodel and wormwood, to books about wizarding history, goblin society and every day household charms. Only being a fifteen by ten by eight foot room it was not that big but there was more than enough space for him to store all of his potion ingredients and books, leaving enough space in the center for him to walk in.

Harry walked up to one of the shelves and grabbed a small vial filled with a light green potion. He had managed to finish the Animagus potion just a few days ago and it was now ready for use.

He climbed back up the ladder, shut and locked the trunk and sat down on his bed. He closed the curtains to his bed and cast several of his most powerful privacy, notice-me-not and silencing spells along and around his bed. He positioned himself so that when he fell his head would hit the pillow, then cocked his head back and drank the potion in a single gulp.

XoX

He was running through a jungle of some kind, he could feel the slightly muggy air rustling and gliding across his fur, it was slightly comforting in an odd way.

His powerful front and hind legs were pushing forward, allowing him to jump from branches and run across the floor with long, powerful strides. He had no way of telling just how fast he was going, but from the way the foliage around him was blurring it had to be fast.

He heard noises coming from all around him, his sharp hearing could pick up the caw of several birds and the cries of other animals in the distance. His eyesight could see everything in front of him with a clarity that was startling, he knew it was night right now, but it didn't even hinder his vision.

He slowed down as he heard the sound of running water and stalked towards the source, his powerful and elegant strides allowing him to move swiftly and silently. Climbing through the forested area proved to be a simple task for him as he hopped over rocks, logs, branches, vines and other objects that were obstructing his path. He soon reached the stream in no time at all.

When he reached the stream he spotted several other animals who had stiffened and were eyeing him warily, deer or maybe some kind of antelope, he couldn't be one hundred percent sure. He felt his instincts telling him to chase them, to hunt them down for sustenance but managed to shrug those desires off for now, instead dipping his head down to take a drink.

However, when he moved his head down a growl surprise escaped his throat. Vivid green eyes were set above a powerful muzzle seemed to glow unnaturally in the dark stared back at him, his powerful limbs were covered in shining black fur, his body was long and muscled. A long tail seemed to move behind him with a mind of its own.

The thing that got to him the most though, white fur on his nose.

It held the shape of a lightning bolt.

The scene soon changed, the forest dissolved and he suddenly found himself flying through a mountainous region. The peaks of the mountains were tipped with glistening white snow, which disappeared the further down the mountain he looked. Down below he could see a large forested area spread between the mountains. It was a beautiful sight.

Unlike in the jungle, where he had felt his instincts to use his powerful strides to run through the forest, and the desire to enjoy the thrill of the hunt. Here he felt freedom, the desire to soar beyond the horizon and a sense of pride that he had not felt before.

His powerful wings beat and flapped against the air, his limbs were tucked into his stomach as he went higher and higher towards the sun, feeling the cold winds ruffle his fur and feathers as he cut through it like a knife.



Looking around his eyes picked up things several dozen miles away, he found that with focus, he could zoom in on animals and vegetation that were nearly forty miles out, allowing him to see even the tiniest of details.

He opened his beak and let out a loud preening cry of pride, his tone held an underlying tone of command, as if he expected others to listen to him.

Seeing a small valley nestled within the mountain range he tucked his wings into his sides so as to decrease his wind resistance, and shot forward at ever increasing speeds. He could see the air currents ahead of him, a light green color that was being cut in two as he flew down. Once again he let out a cry, but this one sounded more like a 'whoop' of joy.

He broke out of his controlled downward flight at the very last moment, his taloned feet ran through the waters of the crystal clear lake. Over in the distance, by the shore, several animals of all kinds bowed to him as he flew along center of the lake. He looked down and could see several fish swimming away from him, the waters of the lake were clear enough that he could see the remains of ancient ruins on the bottom.

He then looked at his reflection, once more green eyes stared back at him, these ones held a gleam that spoke of pride. His beaked face was covered in glowing silver feathers that acted like a mane that went down his chest and across his neck, before abruptly changing into brilliant golden fur that shone brightly in the light. His feet were clawed talons that looked powerful and dangerous for anyone who would dare get too close without his express permission. Powerful silvery wings were set mid-back, and moved him along with powerful and majestic flaps.

But the oddest thing he found out about his body, something that he knew didn't quite belong, was the long scaly black cobra that acted as his tail.

XoX

Harry opened his eyes with a small, thoughtful frown. He had not expected this at all, none of the books he read spoke of two forms.

He would need to talk to Professor McGonagall about this; maybe she could tell him something that would help him.

He sat up and stretched a bit. He felt sore. His arms and legs felt like he had been actually running through a jungle and there was two spots on his back that still tingled from the feeling of having wings attached. He was wondering if that was a common occurrence amongst people who found out their animagus form, when his stomach growled.

Had anyone been around him they would have seen an embarrassed blush at the loud noise his stomach made. The sound was so loud. He shook his head and opened the curtains, letting the sunlight stream in and hit his face. He had taken the potion around early evening, it looked to be about mid-day so he had likely slept through his first two classes this Monday, it was a bit of a shock but he had accounted for it.

Standing up he did some stretches and moved to the showers, enjoying a long, hot shower as he washed himself off.

An hour later Harry found himself in the Great Hall, walking over to the Gryffindor table where his friends seemed to be sitting today.

"Harry!" Hermione said in surprise when he sat down next to her. Her expression turned stern, "where have you been! Do you know how worried we were?"

"Good afternoon to you too Hermione," Harry said with a grin. "I guess I was just a little tired yesterday, I ended up sleeping in."

"Harry," Susan said slowly from the opposite side of the table. "You've been gone for forty-eight hours, you've been gone for two days. Everyone's been searching for you, the teachers have been frantic."

A surprised expression came to Harry's face, he had not accounted for that, it had been unwelcome, but not unexpected that he may have slept through several classes, Missing an entire forty-eight hours, had not.

"Well, I guess we'll call it a forty-eight hour hibernation than," he replied after wrapping his mind around how long he had been asleep.

Did it have something to do with being a double animagus? He had read that most people only slept for around five to eight hours however, even if he did have two forms he should have only slept for around twelve. So why did he end up sleeping such a long time?

"You mean you slept for forty-eight hours?" asked Hannah in shock.

Harry blushed a bit, "Well, I was pretty tired, between all of the things I've been doing life has been rather hectic."

"But no one could find you!" Hermione countered. "We all thought you'd been kidnapped or something."

"That's because I didn't want to be bothered and had charmed my bed so no one would notice me," Harry said, making Hermione's mouth snap shut.

"Oh," she said, trying to remain stern, "well don't do that again."

Harry gave her a grin and gave her a playful salute, "Yes, ma'am!" Hermione scowled playfully while the others laughed.

XoX

Class resumed as usual, the teachers welcomed Harry back from where ever he had been. When he informed them he had been in hibernation Professor Flitwick had joked about all the hard work had done was taking away from his beauty sleep. When the day ended Harry made his way to Professor McGonagall's office, knocking on the door before he waited.

"Mr. Potter," the door fully opened to reveal Professor McGonagall looking at him with mild curiosity. "I am pleased to see you finally decided to come around, though I am displeased that you missed my class."

"I apologize, Professor," said Harry, bowing his head. "With all of the work I was doing I was starting to feel really tired, I went to bed and guess I must have been more exhausted then I thought."

"Indeed," she replied as she eyed him up and down a tad suspiciously. The look went away a moment later as she asked, "now, is there something I can help you with?"

"I actually wanted to return this book," Harry pulled out a small book and tapped it with his wand, muttering 'engogio' to bring it to its normal size, revealing the Animagus book she had given him.

Professor McGonagall took it with some surprise, "I take it you've finished reading it then?"

"Yes, Professor, it was a very good read," he said. "However, I did have a question."

"Oh?"

Harry nodded, "Yes, you see, while I was reading I noticed that it never mentioned whether or not people could have more than one animal form, and I was just wondering if that was possible?"

Professor McGonagall looked startled by the question, she studied him for a moment, noticing the expression on his face. It was like the perfect blend of Lily's inquisitiveness with James' innocent curiosity. Both of Harry's parents had been her favorite students, and seeing their son acting so similar yet so different from both of them, pulled at the Transfiguration Professors heartstrings.

Had she not been so busy comparing the boy to his parents, she may have questioned him on the suspicious timing of his question.

She gained a thoughtful look as she pondered his question, after several seconds she answered slowly, as if unsure of the answer herself. "If such a thing is possible, then I have not heard of it. Theoretically in order to have two forms you would have have to have a split personality, or, at the very least, embody an equal amount of opposing traits. If multi-animagi do exist, then they are rare enough that no one has ever been recorded as one."

"I see, so if someone had opposing traits, say being a loner by nature, but also had the ability to be a natural leader, it would be possible for them to manifest two forms, because they are opposing traits by nature," said Harry.

"Yes, like that exactly," Professor McGonagall said, feeling pleased and proud at how he managed to put her thoughts into words. "You

would need more than just two traits of course, your entire nature would have to be made up of opposing elements."

"That makes sense," said Harry, nodding his head. He placed a hand under his chin in a thoughtful pose, "and is it possible for someone to have the form of a magical animal?"

"Not to the best of my knowledge," Professor McGonagall said pensively. "Though there is a...myth, that Merlin had the animagus form of a dragon. Of course, nearly all knowledge of Merlin and his time has been lost, so much so that artifacts that even hint of being from that time are worth enough to buy a small country."

Harry nodded his head before smiling at his teacher, "Thank you, Professor, you've been very helpful."

"You are welcome, Mr. Potter," McGonagall offered him a smile as he said good bye and left.

So he was in unknown territory as far as anyone knew, he didn't doubt that if Professor McGonagall didn't know the answer, then it was likely no one knew. A small exception may be Albus Dumbledore, but he didn't want to ask him something like that and bring suspicion of his skills to the ancient headmaster. This meant he was going to have to create his own theories and take things a little more cautiously than he had planned.

XoX

The week soon moved into the weekend and Harry found himself alone in the library as he looked up information on Griffins. He had several large books on his table and he was leafing through the pages of one of them, he found information on Dragons, Basilisks, Chimeras and many other beasts. It took him going through several books before he found information on Griffins.

The griffin, griffon, or gryphon is a legendary creature with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. As the lion was traditionally considered the king of the beasts and the eagle was the king of the birds, the griffin was thought to be an especially powerful and majestic creature.

An ancient creature embraced by many cultures, the Celtic animal griffin is a symbol of duality. Part eagle and half-part lion (depending on the region – even part serpent, horse or dog), the meaning of the griffin reflects its dual physical form by presenting a balance of both good and not so good qualities. The griffin's more likeable qualities include nobility, gentleness, and justice. Depicted on ancient stone tombs, griffins are the guardians and protectors of life, and remain loyal in their protection even in the afterlife. Griffins count nobility, vigilance, virtue and strength among their many positive attributes. The griffin is an incredibly strong symbol, and used only when the mightiest gods' attention needs to be captured, and reserved only when the need is greatest. Misused, or invoked for selfish reasons, the griffin brings about gluttony, vengeance, ferocity, and violence. In Roman texts, the Griffin is strongly aligned with the fire god, Apollo. This makes the griffin a possessor of fiery forces – and not to be trifled with when in partnership with Apollo. Given it's power, and considering it can be just as nefarious as it can be kind, respect must be paid when invoking the spirit of the griffin.

Griffins are known for guarding treasure and priceless possessions. Adrienne Mayor, a classical Squib folklorist, proposes that the griffin was an ancient misconception derived from the fossilized remains of the Protoceratops found in gold mines in the Altai mountains of Scythia, in present day southeastern Kazakhstan.

In antiquity it was a symbol of divine power and a guardian of the divine. Some have suggested that the word griffin is cognate with Cherub.

Over the centuries the griffin - as with other mythological creatures - has taken many shapes.

The griffin has served many purposes, including but not limited to "the vigilant guardian of treasure and of kings. It has been called "The Hound of Zeus".

It has pulled the chariots of Pharaoh, Apollo, Nemesis, and Alexander the Great. A major heraldic animal, it has been emblazoned on the shields of knights and on the coats of arms and royalty. It has been watchful and loyal, graceful and swift, rapacious and vengeful, monstrous and divine. While the griffin is a mortal enemy of horses, its magic talons have detected poison and its feathers have cured blindness.

The winged lion is not a true Griffin, nor is the winged lion of the sea. All of them, though - along with countless other hybrid variations - are 'gryphonic.'"

Most statues have bird-like talons, although in some older illustrations griffins have a lion's forelimbs; they generally have a lion's hindquarters. Its eagle's head is conventionally given prominent ears; these are sometimes described as the lion's ears, but are often elongated (more like a horse's), and are sometimes feathered.

Infrequently, a griffin is portrayed without wings, or a wingless eagle-headed lion is identified as a griffin; in 15th-century and later heraldry such a beast may be called an alce or a keythong.

A Hippogriff is a legendary creature, supposedly the offspring of a griffin and a mare.

In heraldry, the griffin's amalgamation of lion and eagle gains in courage and boldness, and it is always drawn to powerful fierce monsters. It is used to denote strength and military courage and leadership. Griffins are portrayed with a lion's body, an eagle's head, long ears, and an eagle's claws, to indicate that one must combine intelligence and strength.

In British heraldry, a male griffin can be shown without wings, its body covered in tufts of formidable spikes. The female griffin is more usually shown, as in the Lindsell crest or the Bevan family crest, right. Some traditions say that only female griffins have wings.

Harry read through several books and all held similar information, while a few seemed to hold new or contradicting facts that made Harry wonder how long it had been since a Griffin had been seen. Still it was useful and he had several depictions of a Griffin that matched the form he had seen in his dream.

"There you are!"

Harry looked up to see Tracey Davis grinning at him, her usual friends Daphne and Blaise weren't with her at the moment and he wondered if she had ditched them.

"Hey, Trace, did you need something?" he asked curiously, closing his book and stretching his arms above his head. He hadn't realized it, but with how long he was sitting there his arms and legs were starting to get stiff.

"No, not really," Tracey said, sitting down next to him and picking up one of the books to leaf through it. "Daphne is in the common room doing some homework and Blaise is off to wherever he goes off to when he wants to be alone, I figured I'd come find you so I could have some entertainment."

"Is that all I'm good for?" asked Harry, making some sniffing noises. "I'm just entertainment to you?"

"Aw, I'm sorry," she patted his head, "you know I love you."

"Right," Harry growled as he swatted her hand off his head and tried to fix his hair.

"I don't know what you're trying to do," she said with a grin, "it's not like your hair will ever change from its after-broom look."

Tracey looked set the book she had down and picked up another. "Griffins? Why are you reading about Griffins?"

"My wand is made from a Griffin feather so I figured it would be a good idea to learn more about them," said Harry, easily coming up with a half-truth.

"You know, most people never bother to learn about the creature their wand cores came from," Tracey pointed out.

"Are you saying I'm most people?" asked Harry.

Tracey giggled into her hand, "no, most definitely not. You're far too crazy to be normal."

"Sanity is overrated anyways," Harry said dismissively, "and I doubt you'd find me half as interesting if I was sane."

"Too true," Tracey agreed with a grin. She never would have thought she would have befriended a Gryffindor after being placed in Slytherin, or anyone from any of the other houses as her house



tended to shy away from others due to the mistrust the other houses gave hers and the mistrust the people in her house had for each other. However, she was very glad that Harry had decided to speak with her and invite her and her friends to that study session those few months ago. She never noticed it, but she was treated much differently by the other houses now that she was friends with Harry and his other friends. People were more open than before. She was very grateful to him for that, and hoped they could remain friends even after they left Hogwarts.

XoX

"Harry," Hermione greeted as she sat down next to him in the common room.

"Hey, Hermione," he said, then noted her pensive look and leaned forward. "Is something wrong?"

"Maybe," Hermione said, leaning in as well to whisper to him. "Remember when Ron was bragging about seeing a giant three-headed dog in the third floor corridor?"

Harry blinked, he was surprised she hadn't forgotten that, of course, there was another explanation, one he didn't like. "Yes, probably just Ron being a braggart, we all know he's like the Gryffindor version of Malfoy."

Hermione laughed a little but then got serious. "Neville confirmed it," she whispered. "He got lost and ended up on the third floor corridor after running from Ms. Norris. He had gotten into one of the rooms to wait for her to leave when he turned around he saw it."

"And he's positive it was a Cerberus?" asked Harry, mentally he groaned, Hermione was inquisitive enough that she would not leave this alone until she discovered what a Cerberus was doing in the school.

"Of course," Hermione said, "I even went to the third floor and checked it out myself. There's really a giant Cerberus in the third floor, but more importantly, I saw it standing over a trap door. That means its guarding something."

"Perhaps you shouldn't look into this too much, Hermione," Harry said carefully. "If it's guarding something then it must be dangerous enough to warrant a guard, and Professor Dumbledore likely has other protections besides the dog."

"But, Harry..."

"Hermione, it would be a good idea to leave whatever is going on in that corridor alone," said Harry. "Looking in any further would likely end up with you getting hurt."

Hermione gave him that look that he had seen from Lisa enough to know what it meant; it told him she was going to do what she wanted regardless of what he said. It was a look that worried him, having seen it many times he knew she would likely go out of her way looking into the dog's presence and get into trouble. He would have to keep an eye on Hermione, to make sure she didn't get hurt, or worse, killed.

"So what are you going to be doing for Christmas?" asked Harry, smoothly changing the subject.

Hermione eyes relit as she began to speak in a rapid fire pace, "I'm going to be visiting some of my relatives who live in..." he listened to her talk on and on about how they were going to be visiting her mom's grandmother in Italy and what they would be doing. It seemed her parents were extremely well traveled, especially for a pair of dentists.

XoX

They met up with the others at dinner that night, choosing to sit at the Hufflepuff table. As Harry was listening to Hannah talk about what she and Susan were doing for the weekends an oddly worried looking Tracey walked up to him.

"Harry," she said in a soft, worried voice, "I need your help."

Harry and the others looked up, he searched her eyes, wondering what she needed him for before nodding and standing up. "Come on," he said, gently grabbing her by the arm and taking her away from the table, where the rest of his friends were muttering and whispering.

"It's Daphne," Tracey said hurriedly as soon as they left the Great Hall. "I'm worried about her; she's been disappearing for several nights now and looks like she's been losing a lot of sleep."

Harry frowned, "Do you know where she's been going?"

"Not exactly," Tracey looked down, gaining a sudden interest in her shoes. "But I know it's somewhere in the North Wing, it's the only place that's more or less abandoned. When we were little, she would always go off alone when she was angry or depressed."

"And you think somethings bothering her enough to do this now?" said Harry, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes."

"Have you talked to her?" he asked.

"I've tried," Tracey actually looked really worried now, Harry thought he could even see tears leaking out of the corner of her eyes. "But every time she came back in and I asked where she was she snapped at me, told me it wasn't any of my business."

"And what makes you think I can do any better?" asked Harry, "You do know she doesn't really like me."

"She just says that," Tracey said quickly, "she doesn't really mean it. Daphne's always been somewhat cold, even when we were little. Trust me, she wouldn't even bother spending time with you if she didn't think of you as a friend."

"I thought she just hung out with me because I was with you," Harry said.

Tracey laughed a bit, but it was hollow, "let me rephrase that. If she didn't like you, and I was going hang out with you, she would tell me I was stupid, shouldn't even be near you and then lock herself in the dungeons until I 'came to my senses'." She put quotation marks in the air.

"She may not look it, but Daphne's always been protective of me."

Harry sighed, "Alright, I'll see what I can do. Do you know what the best time to catch her is?"

"She usually leaves the dungeons around midnight," Tracey answered helpfully. "I've seen her sneaking off around that time, though she tries to be quiet about it."

"Right," Harry gave her a smile, "don't worry, I'll talk to her, even if I have to lock her in a room until she decides to speak." He moved his hand up and gently thumbed away a tear that was at the corner of her eyes, "so no more crying, k?"

"Thank you, Harry," Tracey said, smiling before she gave him a large hug. Harry started for a moment before hugging her back.

"Don't worry about it."

XoX

Later that night Harry was walking around the north corridor under a disillusionment charm. He had already gone through five floors and according to his inner map on the fifth floor, two stairs and several corridors from the library, which was the closest area to the North Wing of the castle.

He came to a sudden halt in front of a tall suit of armor. It was fairly dark, and Harry wished he could transform into his animagus form, becoming a Black Panther with the ability to see in the dark could be right useful right about now. But he had yet to even attempt at making the transformation.

A second later he continued walking along, making careful, silent steps, then stopped again. He heard Sniffling. The kind that came from someone who had been crying and was now trying to stop, it was coming from a door that was slightly ajar. Harry moved towards and quietly opened the door more, peeking inside.

It looked like an unused classroom. The dark shapes of desks and chairs were piled against the walls, and there was an upturned wastepaper basket – but propped against the wall facing him was something that didn't look as if it belonged there, something that looked as if someone had just put it there to keep it out of the way.

It was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was an inscription carved around the top: Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

And there, sitting in front of the mirror with her legs drawn to her chest and her arms wrapped around her legs was Daphne Greengrass. As Harry moved closer he was able to get a good look at her, and she had definitely seen better days.

Her eyes had dark bags under them, a sign of someone lacking the necessary amount of sleep needed to perform day to day activities, they were also red and puffy, which when combined with the large tear tracks running down her cheeks let him know she had been crying. The way she was sitting, holding herself in a slight, protective ball, showed she was trying to protect herself from something, or to deny something, it really depended on why she was crying to begin with.

"Daphne," Harry said, dropping his disillusionment charm.

Daphne yelped as she turned around in shock, clutching a hand to her chest before she realized who it was. "Potter!" she said in surprise, before trying to sneer at him. It was ineffective thanks to the tear tracks on her face. "What are you doing here?"

Several dozen lines that he had picked up from movies and books to say in a situation like this popped through his mind, words that could lighten the mood or string her along cropped up in his head. He said none of these.

"I was looking for you," he moved further into the room, towards her and the mirror. "I noticed you weren't looking to well the other day, and wanted to see if you were alright." It was an easy enough lie; he didn't want Daphne to get upset at Tracey because the girl was worried for her best friend.

"My well-being is none of your business," Daphne snapped, rubbing her eyes in a vain attempt to get rid of the tear tracks.

"Perhaps it's not," replied Harry, moving even closer to her. "On the other hand, you're my friend and I am worried about you. When my friends aren't happy I usually tend to make it my business."

"Are you always this nosy?" she asked.

"Are you always this obstinate?" Harry shot back. They were silent for several minutes before Daphne turned her back to him.

"Why don't you tell me what's wrong?" Harry asked softly.

"I don't want to talk about it."

"It could help," he pointed out.

"You say that like I should care," she replied coldly.

Harry tried to think of the best way to get Daphne to talk. He had read sixteen books on psychology so he knew quite a bit about the human mind, but he had never really used that knowledge before, beyond reading other people by their expressions and actions.

"Well, if you don't care I suppose there's nothing I can do," Harry said slowly. Once again he was going to use was a bit underhanded, but it was the easiest way to get her to tell him what he wanted to know. "I suppose I'll just leave you to whatever you're doing then."

He turned around and made to leave when Daphne shouted behind him, "Wait!"

"Yes?" asked Harry, looking over his shoulder at her. The look on her face was of someone who felt defenseless, unable to protect themselves. He knew Daphne wanted to get her feelings off of her chest, what ever she was thinking about was obviously hurting her. However she also didn't want to be seen as weak, and didn't want others to pity her, which was likely why she hadn't told Tracey.

Harry was an unknown quantity and therefore safe. Logically, it didn't make much sense, a best friend is supposed to be far more trustworthy than someone you didn't like. But the human mind often times ran counter to logic, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the human heart was more powerful than the mind in most people, making them much more prone to acting on their emotions than actually thinking things through.

"If...if I tell you what's bothering me, do you promise not to tell anyone else?" she asked, she looked nervous, wringing her hands

together. Now came the important part, Harry had to say the right thing for her to trust him. If he didn't, she wouldn't tell him anything and he would be back at square one.

Fortunately for him, there was a very easy way to earn her trust.

Harry took out his wand and held aloft, "I, Harry James Potter, swear on my magic, that I will never speak of what Daphne Greengrass, Heiress to the House of Greengrass and I discuss without her express permission to do so, so mote it be."

Daphne's mouth opened in shock but she quickly responded in the appropriate manner, "So mote it be."

There was a small flash of light that emanated from Harry's wand, signifying the oath taking hold.

"I didn't think you would give a wizard's oath," she breathed softly. Her blue eyes flickered a little with emotion, respect, trust and a little bit of admiration. They were gone less than a second later, but one second was a second too long for Harry not to notice.

"Ah, but you should have," Harry responded lightly. "Whenever I do something, I never do it half arsed."

Daphne actually smiled for a second before sighing, she gestured over to one of the desks and sat down. Harry sat next to her and remained silent, waiting for her to speak.

"When I was eight, my mum had gotten pregnant with her third child," Daphne started. "Honestly, I wasn't too happy about that, I already have a younger sister and didn't want another sibling taking my parents attention away from me. It didn't seem to matter to my parents though, they were really happy regardless of what I wanted, and little Stori was too young to understand what another sibling meant. My parents hardly even spent any time with me after that, my mum was dealing with having another child and my father was busy creating a room for the baby, and then they both had to deal with Stori who was only four at the time."

"My father was particularly happy, I later learned they had been trying to have another child," her voice was very soft, almost a whisper. "I remember when mum's water broke, and we all went to

Saint Mungo's Hospital. Stori and I were in the waiting room, dad was with mum and I was suddenly nervous. The last time they had a child I was only four, and I didn't really understand what having a child really meant. We waited for nearly an hour when my father came out."

By now Daphne had started crying again, talking about it was obviously beginning to take a toll on her. Harry moved to sit next to her and placed a hand on her back, rubbing it up and down. It wasn't much, but sometimes physical contact helped keep others from drowning in their emotions. Before Lisa had befriended him and he met her mom, Harry would have given anything to receive a hug from someone who cared when he used to have nightmares about his parents getting killed. "What happened next?" he asked, shaking any unnecessary thoughts off.

"My father, he looked so devastated," she whispered, "like nothing else in the world mattered. We left, without a new sibling and without my mum, I later learned they had both died in child birth."

Harry winced, he knew what it was like for a parent to die, but he only had a year's worth of memories of his parents; of course, he also remembered them in such vivid detail that it the amount of time he knew them didn't matter as much.

"My father's become distant since then, we almost never see him anymore. He tries to be a good father, he gets Stori and I gifts whenever he comes home from his business trips, and makes sure we don't want for anything, but he never smiles, never really talks anymore, and spends almost all his days working." She hung her head, "he's also taken to drinking, several nights he's come home and Stori and I have had to hide because he came home really drunk and angry."

"Has he abused you or your sister?" asked Harry quietly.

"No," Daphne shook her head, sniffing a little. "Whenever he was drunk we would hide, and he wouldn't do that sober. Girls may not be as well liked in the wizarding world as boys are, but abusing a child of any gender is considered one of the greatest crimes one can commit, only second to being a Death Eater."



Harry nodded; he had read that child abusers get thirty years in Azkaban, an infamous wizarding prison, if convicted. This was due to the fact that wizarding children, purebloods in particular were becoming much more rare. He suspected it was due to the high amount of inbreeding pureblood families did to keep the blood "untainted" as it were.

Though he had also read that most people never report any abuse for fear of reprimand from the abuser, and there are more than physical ways to abuse someone.

"I can certainly understand why that would depress you so much," said Harry. "But how come you've never seemed to be bothered by it before? What brought this on now?"

"That mirror," Daphne whispered, waving a hand in the general direction of the mirror. "I saw myself standing with my sister, father, and mum; she was holding a baby."

Harry took a closer look at the mirror, more specifically the inscription at the top. He read it again: Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi, and frowned, then realized the words were backwards. When reversed it said: I show not your face but your heart's desire. It was very easy to see figure out what the mirror did after that.

"You know, I don't have very many memories of my parents," Harry said, it was true enough, he just remembered all the ones he did have like it was yesterday.

"What do you remember?" asked Daphne. At Harry's gaze she looked away. The raven haired youth studied her for a moment, he had been about to make a point on how she should remember the times she had shared with her mom but the question she asked brought him up short.

He didn't particularly want to tell her about his memories, they were private, his and his alone. Not even Lisa knew about his memories, the one time she had asked about his parents Harry had snapped at her. He had felt horrible for days after that and had apologized to her, even going so far as to offer to read those terrible romance novels she liked. Lisa had smiled, waved his apology off, then made him read two hours worth of Harlequin Romance Novels.

Ever since then she had never asked him about his parents, something he was glad for because even if he were inclined to tell her, he wouldn't know how without giving the existence of magic away.

"Well, my mum had red hair, and green eyes like mine," he started, the words came out of his mouth before he could stop them. And once he got started it became hard for him to stop. "She was very kind, I often remember her singing me to sleep. And my dad was a rogue, very mischievous and loved to have fun. He would often take me onto a broom and mum would catch him and start cursing at him," absently he wondered why he was telling this, but the thought was pushed to the back of his mind. There was a bit of a pause before Harry chuckled lightly. "I believe the term you girls would use to describe his relationship with her is whipped."

Daphne giggled lightly, "As all men should be."

Harry stuck his tongue out at her, oddly enough he was feeling a little better. Maybe there was something liberating in getting things off your chest after all. "I will never allow myself to be wrapped around some girls fingers!"

"So you say," Daphne teased before looking curious, "What else do you remember?"

"Just that," Harry lied, feeling better or not there were some things that were just better left unsaid. "I get flashes of them in my dreams, but not much else."

"So you only remember your parents in your dreams?" asked Daphne, Harry didn't respond, letting her come to her own conclusions. She leaned back on the desk and looked at the ceiling, "I don't think I could deal with not knowing anymore about my parents."

Harry shrugged, "Professors McGonagall and Flitwick have told me about them, so it's not like I have nothing. I just have to deal with second hand memories is all. So," he nudged her with his shoulder, "feeling better?"

"Yes," Daphne said, she looked down for a moment, looked back up and then smiled at him. "Thank you."

Harry gave her a grin, "What are friends for?"

Daphne smirked as she stood up, "Who says we're friends?"

"Ouch, that hurt, Daph," Harry held a hand to his heart, "right here."

"Shut up, Potter."

Harry grinned before standing up and stretching, "we should probably get to bed, it's almost one. Can you find your way back without getting caught?" he asked.

"Of course," Daphne replied breezily, "I've been coming here for the past week, I'll be fine."

"Right, good night then."

The blond girl looked at him, several emotions passing through her face, all of which he saw and analyzed the moment they showed. After a few seconds, she smiled again and said, "Good night...Harry."

Harry watched as Daphne left, then made his way to stand in front of the mirror. He stared at what he saw and suddenly realized why Daphne had been coming back so much, what he saw in the mirror was more than enough to make him want to stay. He shook his head and wiped a few stray tears from his eyes as he walked out of the room. Shutting the door he locked it with the most powerful locking charm he knew, along with a notice-me-not charm, and a vanishing charm to make the door invisible.

That mirror was dangerous. It would be best if no one else could ever get to it.

XoX

Some people might complain about this chapter because I not only gave Harry two Animagus forms but one of them is magical. Before you go all half-cocked on me, I do have both a reason for him having these two forms, and an explanation as to WHY he has two forms.

Will I tell you? Meh, not for a while, but you will eventually understand the reason.

Hopefully it will be good enough that everyone will still want to continue reading, but if not I suppose it just sucks to be me.

## Chapter 9: Getting into the Christmas Cheer

XoX

The compartment Harry and his friends were taking from Hogwarts ended up being quite crowded, Blaise, Daphne, Hannah, Hermione, Neville, Susan, Padma and Tracey all tried to squeeze into the seats with Harry. He was very fortunate that Professor Flitwick had shown Harry how they magically expanded the common room, ensuring there would be enough space for everyone. Because of how much concentration and magic it took, he couldn't expand the compartment anymore than three square feet, but that was enough for everyone to fit in comfortably.

Harry let the conversations from his friends wash over him as he looked out at the window, his thoughts on how surprised Lisa would be to see him. He hoped that her school year had been as fun as his, even though he knew she had likely missed him terribly, fondly remembering an incident where she had gone on vacation with her family and been absolutely miserable. When they had gotten back the first thing she had done when they saw each other at school had been to tackle him to the ground and cry as she went on about how much she had missed him.

"Are you alright?" asked Daphne, he looked at her to see she was staring at him with some concern. He also took notice of the fact that she was sitting right next to him, when just yesterday she would not have been caught anywhere near him unless he was with Tracey.

He smiled and said, "I'm fine, just thinking about what presents I should get you all."

"Right," Daphne spoke in a tone that said she didn't believe him. "And Tracey is a very shy girl with a kind and caring disposition."

"Hey!" Tracey shouted, feeling a need to defend herself. "I can be very kind and caring, thank you very much! Why just the other day I was kind enough to tell Blaise here that his hair looked like the back end of an arse so he could fix it."

"And that, is exactly what Daphne's talking about," muttered Blaise, self-consciously running a hand through his hair. He turned to

Neville who was sitting next to him. "My hair doesn't look like the back end of an arse does it?"

"Er... no?" said Neville unsurely, causing everyone to laugh.

"So what are you doing for Christmas, Harry?" asked Hannah.

"I have a friend whose family I'm going to spend Christmas with," said Harry.

"You should also come over to the Dinner party Blaise's mum is having," Tracey said, "You can bring your friend too."

"I don't think I'm allowed," said Harry, smiling wryly.

"Why not?"

"She's a muggle," said Harry, shrugging.

"Oh..." Tracey closed her mouth, seemingly unable to say anything after that.

"So what are muggles like?" asked Hannah, "I've never actually seen one before."

Harry looked at her oddly before replying, "They're just like witches and wizards, only they can't use magic. Instead they make advances in a field called science, which is a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the world. And technology, the making, usage and knowledge of tools, techniques, crafts, systems or methods of organization in order to solve a problem or serve some purpose."

Hannah blinked, "What?"

"They're always creating new ways to do something," answered Hermione, almost rolling her eyes at Harry's answer. "Muggles create things like automobiles to travel in instead of brooms, they use a communication network called the internet to send emails and look up information, rather than using owls to send message and books to read, though they still use books too. Then there's the

telephone, which allows people to talk to each other even if they're on the other side of the world."

"Really? Muggles can talk to people no matter where they are?" asked Susan, looking slightly awed. "Like actually talk?"

"Yep," said Harry, "there are many innovations in the muggle world that far outstrip those of their magical counterparts. In fact, muggles have also already traveled to the moon."

"Wow," Neville said while Blaise whistled.

"Who knew Muggles could do something wizards can't."

Harry sighed and shook his head. He couldn't blame his friends for not knowing about muggles; the Wizarding World's information about muggles was so out of date that the word 'ridiculous' didn't even seem to measure up to just how horrendously little information they had. One of the things he would do when he got the opportunity, was update Hogwarts information about Muggles and reform the Muggle Studies class they had.

Harry once again found himself looking out the window as some of his friends decided to play exploding snap, really, wizarding games were so weird. Who wanted to play a game where the cards explode in your face?

Close to an hour after the train had departed Harry felt a light weight lean into his shoulder, he looked over to see that Daphne had fallen asleep against him, her head resting against him. He smiled lightly and went back to looking out the window.

"Wow, Harry," Tracey said in a quiet voice so as to not wake up her blond friend. She cupped her hand and whispered, "I don't know what you said to her when you two spoke last night, but whatever you said to her must have really struck a chord. I don't think I've ever seen her let her guard down like this."

Harry would have shrugged, but since Daphne's head was currently using it as a pillow, decided not to. "I didn't do that much, just managed to out-stubborn her is all," he said.

"I don't believe that," the brunette replied. "Daphne rarely lets people even touch her, much less initiates contact. And this morning, she may have looked a little tired, but she looked much better than she has all week." She looked down at her sleeping friend, wondering about the near 180 degree change in Daphne's disposition towards Harry.

"Let's just say we've had a similar experience," said Harry mysteriously.

Tracey frowned a bit, along with a few of the others who were listening in but no amount of prodding would get Harry to reveal what he and Daphne had talked about. The rest of the time on the train was spent in conversation among the group of friends. Harry only partook a little bit as he let his mind wander elsewhere.

When the train finally came to a stop Harry gently shook Daphne awake. "Hey, wake up Daph," he said.

"Mmm, wha – wazzat?" Daphne blinked her eyes open and brought up a hand to rub at them. She looked up to see Harry grinning at her, then looked around to see everyone staring at her with varying degrees of amusement (Neville and Blaise), light jealousy (several of the girls in the compartment), or both. "Are we at Kings Cross?" she asked, trying to ignore everyone staring at her. She also did her best not to blush, it was bad enough that she had actually been caught using someone's shoulder as a pillow. If they saw anything more, the reputation she was building would be ruined.

"Yeah, so we figured it was time for you to wake up, sleeping beauty," Tracey said with a grin.

"Shut up," Daphne mumbled.

Harry took out his wand and levitated everyone's trunks down, a few of the others shook their heads, still marveling at the amount of control he had over his magic. They all walked out of the compartment, which shrunk back to its normal size after they left, and made their way off the train.

"There's my dad," Daphne said, discreetly pointing to a tall man with short blond hair, blue eyes and an expression that was so dead it



made the post-apocalyptic zombies Harry had seen in comic books looked more alive.

"No offense, Daph, but your dad looks kind of creepy," said Harry.

"None taken."

"Daphne," the man said in a deep, if monotone, voice. "It's time to go say good-bye to your friends."

Daphne gave a hug to Tracey and said quick, luke warm good-bye to everyone else. She turned to Harry and gave him a hug too, squeezing just a little tighter than he had expected.

"Good bye, Harry," she whispered, "and thank you."

"See you after Christmas," he whispered back.

As Daphne left with her father, another voice spoke up.

"Neville, there you are."

They all turned to see a tall, thin and bony witch came over to them. She was wearing a hat with a stuffed vulture on it and carrying a bright red handbag.

"Gran," Neville said, sounding more nervous than Harry had ever heard him, a feat unto itself since he still hadn't managed to get the boys confidence up. "I-I would like to introduce you to some of my friends," Neville's gran looked at him for a moment, turned to Harry and the others, then nodded.

Neville sighed slightly and spoke a little more surely, "Gran, I think you already know Susan Bones, this is Hannah Abbott, Tracey Davis, Blaise Zabini, Padma Patil, Hermione Granger and Harry Potter."

The old woman started at the last name and turned towards Harry, she eyed his scar for a moment, after which she gave him an imperious stare. Being used to such stares from his uncle Harry did not react as he looked into her eyes without blinking, this went on for several long and awkward seconds before the old woman nodded, seemingly to herself, and held out her hand.

"Mr. Potter, I'm Augusta Longbottom, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance," she said.

"The pleasure's all mine, ma'am," replied Harry, bending low over her hand as he kissed it in a show of respect for the older woman. "I see my grandfather's journal about you rings true."

"Oh?" she raised an eyebrow and Harry thought he saw a flicker of amusement in the woman's eyes. "And what did Charlus' journal say about me?"

"That you could likely scare the Minister into resigning by just staring at him," Harry said with a grin, ignoring the sharp gasp from Neville and surprisingly Susan.

Augusta then did something Neville had never heard from her, she laughed. "Oh...you're just like Charlus and James," she said, "I was good friends with your grandfather, there had even been talks of a marriage contract between us before it was canceled; and I knew your father very well, he was good friends with my son, Frank, Neville's father."

"Did you know my mother?" asked Harry.

"A little," she admitted a little reluctantly, "I only met her during the war. She struck me as a very talented witch, for a muggle-born."

Harry nodded, but inside he frowned at hearing the slight against muggle-borns.

Neville left with his Gran a few seconds later and the others began looking for their parents again.

"I should probably head off," Hermione said, "my parents will be waiting for me on the other side." Harry and the others nodded. The way to get to platform nine and three-quarters required you to be magical, so the parents of a muggle-born witch or wizard would not be able to get onto the platform and had to wait for their children to walk through.

"I'll see you guys later," Hermione said, giving Harry a squeeze as she ran off towards the exit.

"I should probably get going too," Padma said after a few a while. She sighed, "Parvati's likely already found my parents and is complaining about how I get to spend more time with Harry Potter than she does."

"I don't see what the big deal about spending time with Harry Potter is," Harry said dismissively. "He seems like a jerk to me."

Padma giggled as she gave him a hug goodbye and waved to the other four.

"Where's your aunt, Su?" asked Hannah as she searched the area for any sign of her parents or Susan's aunt.

"Right over there! Look!" Susan pointed to the spot where a woman was standing. Said woman was a square-jawed witch with close-cropped grey hair and a monocle.

"Auntie! Over here!" Susan shouted as she waved at her Aunt. The woman spotted her and made her way over, Harry noted how a lot of people in the crowd parted for her and wondered if it was because of the commanding aura she projected or out of respect for her position. Either way the woman struck him as similar to professor McGonagall, strict but fair.

"Susan, there you are," she said before turning her attention to Hannah. "It's good to see you again, Hannah. How have you and Susan been getting on?"

"Oh, we've been good Madam Bones," Hannah replied with a small curtsy.

"Auntie, I'd like to introduce you to some of my new friends," Susan said. "This is Tracey Davis and Blaise Zabini," Susan's Aunt eyed the two and nodded at them. "And this is Harry Potter."

"Harry Potter?" her eyes lingered on her scar for a moment before she stuck out her hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you Mr. Potter, Susan has had some very good things to say about you in every letter she's sent." Susan blushed a little at that, casting a discreet glance at Harry as she did so.

"Madam Bones," Harry said, taking her hand. Rather than kiss the back he gave her a firm shake, he recognized her as a woman who didn't like to stand on ceremony.

"Just Amelia is fine when we're not in the Ministry," she said.

"Then you can call me Harry," he replied.

"I must admit, some of the stories I've heard about you from Susan are quite extraordinary," she told him. "Perhaps we may get the chance to speak some more."

"I look forward to it," Harry said.

Amelia nodded, "Hannah, your parents are a little busy and asked me to take you to the Bones estate."

"Ok," Hannah replied. She turned to Harry and the others, "see you guys later!"

"Bye," Susan said, giving them a shy smile and a wave.

"Later," said Harry with a wave.

"Looks like it's just us," said Blaise.

"Seems like it," Harry looked around. "Where are your parents?"

"Right over there," Blaise said, gesturing with a nod of his head. Harry turned and saw two women. One was a dark-skinned Italian beauty with lustrous black hair and light blue eyes, while the other had long dark brown hair and soft brown eyes that looked like an older Tracey. They were with a man who was about two heads taller than either of them, with same hair color as Tracey's mom but with cobalt eyes instead.

"Mum! Dad!" Tracey greeted cheerfully as she was given a hug by both of them.

"I missed you so much," the women said as she hugged her daughter for all she was worth. "How was your first semester at Hogwarts? I see you made a new friend."

"I did," Tracey grinned as she backed up and made a grand gesture towards Harry. "May I present to you, Harry Potter."

All three of the parents turned their eyes towards him, more specifically, his scar. Harry held in a sigh of annoyance, and a slight desire to punch Tracey's father in the face. He would never hit a woman, as it was against his moral code.

"Mr. Potter," Mr. Davis said at last, holding out his hand, "it's a pleasure to meet you."

"The pleasure's all mine," Harry said with a firm shake.

"Hello Harry, my name is Elicia," Tracey's mum replied, holding out her hand daintily.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Harry said, lightly touching her hand as he bent down and kissed it. "I can see where Tracey gets her beauty." Behind him he heard Tracey sputtering a bit and grinned, the girl had been a tease all semester and it was nice to be able to pay her back.

"Indeed," Elicia smiled, "I'm pleased to see Tracey is making new friends. What house are you in?"

"Well the sorting hat had some problems placing me in one, but we eventually decided on Gryffindor," said Harry.

"Oh? So my daughter's gaining friends outside of her house?" Elicia looked pleased, "and with her house's supposed enemy, how wonderful. I never liked how the houses were set up."

"I'm glad someone thinks the way I do," said Harry. "And yes, Tracey and I are good friends, she managed to worm her way into my heart with her subtle charm and sweet disposition."

Mr. Davis snorted in laughter, "my daughter? Charming and sweet? You joking!"

"Dad!" Tracey yelled, her face turning red, whether from embarrassment or anger was unknown.

"I am," said Harry. He leaned in and in a stage whisper said, "Don't tell her this but she's a bit abrasive, always trying to tell us what to do and how to act."

"Potter!"

"Now Trace, don't be – oof – get off!" Harry said as Tracey jumped onto his back and locked her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist.

"Not until you take it back!"

"No! Now get off!"

"Take it back and I will!"

"Then we're going for a long time because I'll never take it back!"

"Potter! Take it back!"

The battle to get the brunette girl off his back wore on, and Harry eventually decided to ignore the girl as if she weren't even there. He turned to the amused Italian beauty and put on a charming smile. "You must be Blaise's mum, I would tell you that you're as beautiful as he is, but since he's a bloke and I don't really find him all that attractive, I'll just let you know that you could outshine the stars and be done with it." As he spoke, Harry found himself almost glad that Lisa had forced him to read some of her romance novels, if for no other reason than the number of ways they gave to compliment a woman on her beauty, something that was a bit of a necessity when meeting woman of a high pureblood station in life.

The woman gave a soft laugh, Harry shivered at the sound, it much like having honey poured in ones ears. He absently wondered if the woman was a singer, because she had one of the most beautiful voices he had ever heard.

He immediately shook the thought off as she held out her hand, "it seems you've taken after your father in the charms department, Harry. I'm Celestina, but you can just call me Celeste."

Despite having Tracey still clinging to him (she now simply had her arms around his neck and her head on his shoulders) Harry bent low

and kissed Celestina's hand as if the brunette was not even there. Celestina raised an eyebrow, impressed at the subtle show of physical prowess. She had always disliked how most wizards let themselves go when it came to their physical abilities and looks, relying on their magic for everything.

"Your name means Heavenly, if I'm not mistaken," Harry said. At her smile he nodded, "A very fitting name. I take it you went to school with my father?"

"I did, we all did, in fact," she gestured to Mr. and Mrs. Davis. "I was the only Slytherin who can claim to have dated James Potter."

"You dated my dad?" Harry asked, his mouth gaping a bit. Celestina smiled, showing perfect, white teeth as she gently closed his mouth with a delicate finger.

"I did."

"Wow," Harry muttered, "not that its hard to understand why he decided to date you." An exgagerated sigh escaped his lips, "if only I were older." Celestina let out that soft laugh again.

"If you're done buttering up my mum, Potter," Blaise mumbled, lightly glaring at his friend.

"Now be nice Blaise," Celestina mildly scolded her son. "It's not often I get to meet such a charming young man, and the son of a good friend too." She turned back to Harry, "It was a pleasure to meet you Harry. If you have time, you should visit my house this Christmas for a small gathering I'm holding." She turned her eyes to Tracey, "Your girlfriend will be there too."

Both Tracey and Harry blushed, and Tracey screamed, "He's not my boyfriend!"

"She's right, I'm far too young to be thinking about dating," Harry said. "Though you didn't have to sound so angry."

Despite not being able to see her face, Harry could almost see her rolling her eyes at him.

"Anyways, thank you for the invitation, but I was planning on spending Christmas with a friend of mine," he replied graciously to Celestina's offer. "And please call me Harry."

"Very well, Harry," she paused. "If Christmas doesn't work, would you be able to visit on December thirty first? You could bring your friend if you'd like."

"I'll definitely try to make the thirty-first, however my friend is a muggle, so I don't think she'd be allowed to come."

"A muggle?" Celestina sounded a bit surprised, though surprisingly there was no distaste. At his nod she smiled. "Fascinating, I often venture into the Muggle world myself, they tend to have the best fashion designers."

"Really?"

"Oh yes, I simply love muggle fashion –"

"Mum," Blaise said, interrupting his mother before she could begin talking about her shopping expeditions into the muggle world. Honestly, he thought to himself, it was a wonder his mom had such a high station with her love of muggle fashion. Especially considering nearly every other pureblood's distaste and sometimes even outright hatred of all things muggle.

"Right, I suppose I got a bit off track," she said. She turned to Harry and smiled at him again, "it was a pleasure to meet you, Harry."

"You too, ma'am."

"Celeste, young man."

"Right," Harry blushed a bit as she left.

"Tracey, dear, if you could – get off Harry so we can leave, you're making your father look like he's about to throw a Bludger at your boyfriend."

"Mum!" Tracey yelled with a blush, "he's not my boyfriend."



Elicia gave a knowing smile, "Nevertheless, you should get off of him, even if he is strong enough to carry you."

"Fine," Tracey let go of Harry and grinned, "I'll see you later, Harry."

"Bye, Trace," Harry waved after her. He watched as the group walked away, feeling rather pleased with himself. He had just met several of the more prominent members of wizarding society, two of which were the heads of their houses and one who held a high political office. Hopefully, he wasn't too over the top in his greeting of them.

With everyone else now gone, Harry walked through the barrier separating platforms nine and ten, made his way out of the station and into a bathroom stall, making sure no one was around before he disappeared with a soft crack.

XoX

He reappeared on top of a tree branch in the small park located just a mile away from Privet Drive. It was a tricky bit of magic but Harry had been apparating, which he learned was what wizards called it, since he was nine.

There were only a few people around, two small children who looked related playing in the sand box and a young woman in her early twenties who was likely their babysitter standing off to the side. They hadn't noticed him, which was good.

He jumped down from branch to branch, silently, before hitting the ground with a soft thud. Harry quickly walked away before the woman could notice him, and began making his way towards Lisa's. He got there, he knocked on the door and stood back to wait.

"Coming!" Came the voice of Mrs. Crawft from the other side. She opened the door, wearing an apron and smelling of cooking oils, "can I – Harry!"

Harry found himself engulfed in a hug and closed his eyes as he returned it.

"How are you, dear?" Mrs. Crawft asked, pulling away with a smile as she began to fuss over him. "How's your school, and what are you doing here?"

"I'm fine Mrs. Crawft," Harry said, "Schools good, and I'm here because I was hoping that I could spend Christmas with Lisa." He looked embarrassed for a minute, "I would have sent a message but we have no way to communication from school." Actually he just didn't know how to get letters sent to muggles that knew nothing of magic, he had thought to ask his friends but since none of them knew anything about muggles didn't think they would know how.

"Oh that's alright," Mrs. Crawft replied, standing back up and ushering him inside. "Lisa will be so happy to see you, she's been absolutely miserable since you left."

"Where is she?" asked Harry.

"She's in her bedroom," Mrs. Crawft said. "That's where she usually is nowadays; hopefully you can cheer her up. Are you staying with us?"

"I don't want to impose but I was hoping to," said Harry. "I only came to see you guys and seeing the Dursleys would likely ruin Christmas."

"You'd never be able to impose on us, you know that," Mrs. Crawft paused. "I'll set up the bed in the guest room, oh, and dinner will be at six."

"No need to worry, I can set up the bed," said Harry. "And thank you."

"You're very welcome," she smiled at him. "Now, go see Lisa, she'll be ecstatic to see you."

Harry nodded and made his way to Lisa's room, knocking on the door when he got there.

"Come in!"

Harry walked in to see Lisa's room was the same as always, colored a light blue, with white furniture and a queen sized bed with blue

sheets. Lisa was lying on her stomach, facing away from the door so she couldn't see Harry.

"Is dinner ready yet?" she asked.

"Your mum said it would be ready at six."

"HARRY!" Lisa jumped off the bed and smashed right into him, tackling him to the floor where she straddled his waist. "I missed you so much! Everything was so boring without you! And Dudley's friends have gotten really mean at school! They've been trying to pick on everyone now that you're gone! We're just lucky Big Dork and the rat left for another school or life would have been a whole lot worse! And I'm really glad you're here! I missed you!"

"Lisa, Lisa, slow down," Harry said, fighting to keep up with the excited girl's fast-paced jabbering. "I can hardly keep up when you talk like that," he joked.

"Sorry," she blushed embarrassedly. "It's just that I'm so excited to see you."

"I'm glad to see you too," Harry said, smiling at the girl sitting on top of him. "Now, could you please get off me?"

Lisa grinned as she lay down and latched her arms around him, "No."

"Lisa."

"Make me."

"Fine," Harry said before bringing his hands to her torso and tickling her.

"Yes – what! No! Hahaha no! That's not – hahaha – fair, not the stomach! Hahaha – stop it – Harry – Harry!"

XoX

"So what are we doing, Harry?" asked Lisa as they walked around down town London.

"Well, I just got out of school, so I haven't gotten a chance to go Christmas shopping for anyone," said Harry, he had convinced her parents to drop them off. Normally Lisa's parents would be worried, but they knew Harry often took a cab to London and had been doing so since he was eight. It had bothered them for a long time, but seeing how responsible he often was had calmed them down.

"So does that mean you're going to get me a Christmas present?" asked Lisa excitedly.

"Of course," said Harry, giving his best friend an amused grin. "Far be it from me not to get my first and best friend a Christmas present."

"Yeah! I knew you loved me," Lisa cheered, grabbing onto Harry's left arm.

Harry rolled his eyes and smiled at her.

"So, what store are we going to first?" asked Lisa after several minutes of walking.

"Bookstore," said Harry, pointing to a large book store that looked like they were having some kind of sale. The two of them entered the store and looked around, Lisa went over to the romance section, and act which made Harry roll his eyes, while he went to the poetry section. He ended up getting a book of poetry from the likes of Mathew Arnold, Jane Austen and William Allingham. Padma was a huge fan of poetry, but she had only ever read wizarding poems, and as a Ravenclaw he felt she would appreciate learning something about the other side.

Harry walked over to the romance section to see Lisa sitting on one of the chairs reading one of those books about people who have love affairs with the wives of their first cousins twice removed on their mother's side, or something like that. "Interesting read?" asked Harry.

Lisa jumped and looked up, promptly blushing as she quickly stuffed the book under the seat. "O-of course not, I just wanted something to read while you did your thing," she said.

Harry looked amused for a moment as Lisa tried to hide the very Adult book she had picked up. It was the girls biggest weakness, though he had no clue where she had first started reading those books. Maybe her mother had some?

"Right," he said dryly, "well, if your done reading your smut novel, perhaps we can go to the check up line."

"It's not smut," Lisa argued as she stood up, "it's a highly romantic novel about a man who ends up falling in love with the woman his brother is set to marry. It's very passionate."

"As I said," Harry replied with a smirk, "smut." Lisa just scowled at him and went off on a rant about how he wouldn't know true romance if it hit him in the face. Having never really thought about anyone romantically, he couldn't help but agree at the moment.

They went up to the front and waited for a cashier. When they got there, the cashier totaled him at twenty five pounds and Harry pulled out a wallet stuffed to the brim with muggle pounds. He ignored Lisa's gaping as he paid the equally gaping cashier who thanked him and bade him a good day.

"How are you so rich?" asked Lisa as the exited the store.

"My parents," said Harry, "I just found out they left me a lot of money."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, looking ashamed. She had learned a long time ago that talking about his parents was taboo to him.

Harry placed an arm around her shoulder and gave a reassuring smile, "don't worry about it."

Their next stop was a jewellery store, if there was one thing even Harry knew, it was that woman loved jewellery and he was sure his friends were no different. He wasn't quite sure what kind of jewellery his friends would like but he had a few ideas that he felt would work. The woman manning the cash registered eyed them skeptically as they came in, wondering what a pair of children were doing in this store.

Harry walked around and kept an eye on Lisa, watching for anything she might find interesting. By the time they were finished she still hadn't even looked at anything, beyond small glances. He sighed and went up to the woman, pulling out a small piece of paper.

"Do you do custom jobs?" he asked.

"We do, on occasion," she allowed slowly, looking at him with the same skepticism she had the whole time he and Lisa had been in the store. "For the right price."

"Of course," Harry said, "I want a pendant as similar to this as possible, made out of 24 carat gold with silver lining the sides in this pattern."

The woman looked at the small design and gaped for a moment. "T-this will be very expensive," she croaked out at last.

"That's fine, money's not an issue," Harry said. "How does the payment work? Can I pay you half now and half when it's complete?"

"Erm..." The woman blinked for a minute as she tried to process an appropriate answer. "Yes, that would work, we usually offer payment plans but if you can do this it will be fine."

Harry frowned at her response but shrugged it off and once again pulled out his wallet, earning a gasp from the woman who looked at the money bulging out. "How much will it be?" he asked.

"Fi-five thousand pounds," the woman's eyes had not left the wallet as Harry counted five thousand pounds then split it in half.

"Is there anything I need to sign? And when can I expect the necklace to be ready?"

"Uh...how soon do you need it?" asked the woman, her eyes still on the wallet as her mind began to wonder how a wallet could possibly carry five thousand pounds.

The joys of using magic.

"Before Christmas, at least a day before Christmas."

"Ok," the woman seemed to pull herself together as she gathered a form, "just sign these forms please."

"Right," Harry signed the forms, which essentially stated that they guaranteed customer satisfaction or your money back and a lot of other legalese that Harry only knew about because he had read books on law and economy.

"Everything looks to be in order," the woman muttered. "Very well, Mr. Potter, we will have your items done by no later than the nineteenth."

"Excellent, I'll be back by then to pick them up," Harry walked back out the store. Lisa, who had been gaping at the generous stacks of money, noticed he was leaving and quickly followed him out.

They went around to several other stores and Harry bought several things he thought his friends might like, he also decided to plan a trip to Diagon Alley and get some gifts of the wizarding kind as well. He also finally found a gift that Lisa would like after she had looked at a very expensive piece of clothing by Gucci that he went into get, claiming to just be looking to Lisa before talking with one of the men working there about making the clothes in Lisa's size and paying them a hefty advance fee.

Once Harry had half the shopping done they stopped in a small eatery to have a pizza, and then went to the movies and saw a movie about a witch that changed a prince into a beast because of his bad behavior and he had to make someone fall in love with him to become human again. Lisa loved it, while Harry thought it was garbage, much to his best friend's chagrin and disappointment. He had been forced to listen to her rant about the movie for several minutes afterwards.

Two hours later the day was coming to an end and Harry and Lisa finished searching the stores and Harry had gotten a few more items, board games that he planned on bringing to school for the common room. They met Mrs. Crawft at the designated area around four o'clock.

"How as shopping?" she asked as the two got into the back.

"Good," said Harry, patting the large bag he had filled with games as Lisa nodded her head. He wished he could shrink the thing and cursed the laws that didn't allow him to use magic in front of muggles.

"So what have you got there, Harry?"

"Just some board games I plan on bringing to school," said Harry as he told them about the house common room, making it sound like some kind of club house for all of the students.

When they got home Harry and Lisa headed to her room, greeting Mr. Crawft as they passed, while Mrs. Crawft went to make dinner. After a rather filling dinner, one which Harry loved much more than the food Hogwarts offered due to it being made by someone who genuinely cared for him, Harry said good night and made his way to his bedroom. When he closed the door he heard a rustle and a low hoot and looked over to see Hedwig staring at him with her intelligent Amber eyes.

"Hey Hedwig," said Harry. Using his magic to summon a box of owl treats from his trunk, he fed her a few and stroked the top of her head. "Had a good flight?"

She hooted in what sounded like an affirmative.

"That's good," he paused, "just be careful not to be seen by Lisa and her family, or any of the muggles if you can help it."

She gave him a 'who do you take me for' look before nipping his finger and flying back outside. Harry chuckled a little, wondering if he really could understand his snowy owl, or if he was just humanizing her as he had read most people often did to their pets.

He shook the thoughts off and went to bed.

XoX

The Black panther is a rare, fearless, powerful and intelligent animal. It is one of the most aggressive and most feared animals in the world. The black panther is not a distinct animal species though. The term black panther is commonly used for one or several kinds of closely related all-black big cats.



An animal's habitat is the place where its basic needs for food, water, shelter, and reproduction are met. Black panthers are adapted to living in a wide variety of habitats within their range. The black panther's habitats include the rain forest, marshland, woodlands, swamps, savannahs, and even mountains and deserts.

One of the reasons that black panthers are able to live in such variety of habitats is that they can eat many types of animals. Their food includes various species of mammals, reptiles, and birds, all of which live in different habitats. They are also able to live in human-populated areas more effectively than any other big cats if they have to.

Black panthers, both black leopards and black jaguars, are found mainly in dense rainforest areas. The dark coat of black panthers provides good camouflage at night or in dense forest areas. Such camouflage helps them to avoid dangerous enemies and to stalk and approach their prey without being noticed. These areas do not attract human dwellers or even hunters.

A black panther cub is usually born in the same litter along with other light-colored leopard cubs. Typically, a leopard litter consists of two to three cubs but, sometimes, up to six. Black panther cubs are born with their eyes closed and are covered with faintly spotted smoky gray fur. They weigh about 450 to 1000 g (16 to 35 oz).

The mother leopard has to stay at the den all the time during the first few days after the birth to rest and nurse the newborn baby panthers. Meanwhile the cubs spend most of their time sleeping and nursing on their mother's rich milk. About ten days after their birth, the cubs open their glazed eyes and get their first glimpse of the world. While the cubs still lack of mobility, the mother leopard will have to leave her cubs unattended as she travels far from the birth den to find food for her family. This is the period when the defenseless cubs are most vulnerable to predators; therefore, the choice of a site for a birth den is so crucial to the safety of baby black panther cubs.

A black panther is the melanistic variant of several species of cats within the panthera group. Melanism is hereditary, but it is not necessarily passed directly from one generation to the next. A black panther can have black or fair-colored spotted leopards as parents

and is usually born along with other fair-colored spotted leopard cubs.

Female leopards usually give birth to their first litter at about two-and-a-half years old. Mating can take place at any time of the year. The leopard is solitary. Adult male leopards live alone for most of their adult lives. A male leopard stays together with a female leopard for only a few days during the mating period. A female leopard bears and raises cubs alone. The gestation period is about 90 to 105 days.

The black panther cubs can follow the mother to the hunting fields and start to learn hunting skills two to three months after birth. They can catch medium-size prey after seven to nine months old. Fewer than half of black panther cubs still survive at the age of one. Those who do survive become increasingly independent. By the age of two, almost all young black panthers become fully independent and have established their own home ranges. They can live about 12 years in the wild and 20 years in captivity.

The raven haired youth flipped through the pages of the book he was reading on his first animagus form, looking through the various information and looking up diagrams that showed the skeletal and muscular structure, along with the organs of his animal. Becoming an animagus required an in-depth knowledge of the animal you are aiming to become, how their bodies work, what their natural habitat is like and how their instincts make them react to any given situations. It was a long and arduous process but Harry hoped that with this knowledge, along with the practice he would be putting into his Transfiguration skills when he got back to school, he would become capable of assuming this form before the end of the year.

"Hey Harry, what are you reading?" asked Lisa as she plopped down next to him with a small book in her hand.

"Black Panthers," said Harry.

"Oh, why?" she asked as she leaned over his shoulder to look at the book.

"School," Harry said, "I've got a project on panthers."

"Ugh, they actually give you homework during the holidays?" asked Lisa, wrinkling her nose in distaste.

Harry chuckled, but didn't correct her. It was a project, just one he was doing as a self-study and not part of his actual curriculum.

"So what are we going to do today besides read?" asked Lisa.

"Well, I'm going to head over to the dojo and see Master Wei," said Harry.

"Great, so I get to watch an old man beat you up for an hour," Lisa sighed.

"He doesn't beat me up."

"Then what would you call getting bruised and bloodied from fighting an old man?" she asked.

"Training," said Harry.

"That's the lamest thing I've ever heard," Lisa said.

Harry rolled his eyes. "You just don't understand that to get stronger I need to train, and it's best to train by sparring against someone better than you."

"Your right, I don't understand," Lisa said. "How anyone could possibly enjoy getting beaten up is something that is far beyond me." Harry rolled his eyes at his friend's sarcastic tone and stood up.

After checking out the book Harry felt provided the most information he and Lisa went to the Dojo. Inside they found Master Wei, meditating in the center of the dojo.

"Ah, I was wondering if you would be coming back for the holidays," he said to Harry who walked up to him. "Get your gi on, I shall see if you have truly been practicing, or if you have slacked off on your training."

What followed was another beat down as Master Wei sparred with him, informing him of every mistake he made.

"Your form is too sloppy, straighten up."

"Don't throw your punch so high, I'm down here."

"Never let your opponent grab hold of you, unless you're sure you have the advantage."

"I see your style is still very flashy, too flashy, this is not a kung fu movie."

"I happen to like my style," Harry defended as he launched himself in an aerial reverse kick, one which his sensei dodged easily. "It suits me, and that's what you said you wanted us to do," he dodged backwards as Master Wei came in with a punch, then tripped as it turned out to be a feint and had his legs swept out from under him.

"But only if it is a sound style," his master shot back as he pulled back the fist that he had stopped right in front of Harry's nose. "You jump around like a monkey, wasting energy with your rolling and twirling to dodge."

"It works on most people," Harry muttered. He sighed as he got back up and moved into a looser stance.

"Ready? Kai!"

Harry came in fast, attempting to get several jabs at specific pressure points on his sensei's torso. However, each and every hand was subtly redirected over Master Wei's shoulders.

"You're still too slow."

Harry frowned and attempted to speed up, he began to pull on his magic and use, using a modification of his levitation abilities to increase the speed of his attacks. It wasn't very effective, but there was a slight widening of his Sifu's eyes, the only sign of surprise on the old man's face that let him know it was working. But even with the increased speed it still wasn't enough and Harry found himself on his stomach as Master Wei held his hand behind his back.

"Hmmm...there is some improvement," he admitted. Harry smiled, even though his arm was beginning to feel numb. His Sifu's next sentence caused his smile to cease. "But you still have so many flaws that even a chipmunk could see through them."

Harry heard laughing and turned to glare at Lisa, who was grinning widely at him. He grumbled a bit about insulting teachers and good for nothing best friends before getting up to continue his sparring.

XoX

An hour later Harry was lying on the couch in front of the T.V. as he and Lisa watched Star Wars, Return of the Jedi. His head was lying in Lisa's lap as she absently ran a hand through his hair, it was a position they had been in many times after she had found a new love for his unruly and messy locks and Harry would never admit it to anyone, but he loved the feel of someone running their hands through his hair.

"Ooo, I love this part," said Lisa as Princess Leia told Han Solo that Luke was her brother and they shared a passionate kiss.

"Of course you do," Harry sighed. "You're a girl, you're always into that sappy love stuff."

"Hush you," Lisa said, causing Harry chuckle as he shifted onto his side.

"Harry, Lisa, dinners ready," came the voice of Mrs. Crawft from inside the dining room.

"Be right there mum!" called Lisa, "come on, Harry, time to eat."

Harry grumbled a bit as he rolled onto the floor and picked himself up, ignoring Lisa's laughing as he stretched and yawned widely. The pair moved into the kitchen to share a meal with Lisa's family.

XoX

The week seemed to pass a lot faster than Harry would have liked. He and Lisa spent several hours walking around London, shopping, eating out and watching movies, Harry had gotten the Christmas present that had to be custom made and made sure to hide the gift he got for Lisa. The only real thing of interest that had happened was Harry's little run in with Dudley and his gang who were also home for the holidays.

XoX

"Well, look who's come back," said Piers as he, Dudley and the others walked up to Lisa and Harry who had been enjoying the swings at the park. "Hey, big D, perhaps we should teach him a lesson now."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Did you get dumber since the time I've been away? You do realize that school is supposed to be where you get smarter, right?"

"Shut up!" said one of the other thugs, he looked new since Harry didn't remember him but he was almost as fat as Dudley. "We'll show you who's in charge now!"

"So you said Dudley's friends have been picking on you more often since I've been at my new school, didn't you Lisa?" asked Harry as he got off the swing.

"Uh, yeah, they've been pretty mean to me, and everyone else," answered Lisa, wondering where her friend was going with this.

"Right, well, then it's a good thing you guys have come here," Harry cracked his knuckles. "If you hadn't, I may not have been able to teach you a lesson properly."

"You think you can beat us?" asked Dudley, hiding his fear behind false bravado. "I've become a boxing Champion at Smeltings, I'll beat your arse!"

"Language, big D," Harry said, "we're in the presence of a lady after all."

Dudley snorted. "I don't see a lady, just a stupid little girl." He grinned at Harry and cracked his knuckles. "How we're going to be the ones who teach you a lesson."

Harry quickly moved into his stance as the group of five came at him, two from the left, one from the right with Dudley charging him right down the center and Piers coming in from behind. Harry sighed as Dudley reached him, bringing his fist back and throwing all his force behind his punch.

"You'll never hit me if you project your moves like that," said Harry as he moved his body with a sidestep to the left, reached out, grabbed Dudley's arm and used his own strength and force to throw him into Piers. As they went down screaming with Dudley flattening his twig thin friend, Harry rotated on the balls of his feet and kicked the two from the left, who had just managed to reach him, in the face and stomach respectively.

"And you two are too slow," said Harry right as the other kid came up from behind him. Harry ducked a punch, grabbed the arm and threw the kid by using his back as a lever. He stood back up and dusted his hands. "See, Lisa? I told you my training was useful."

Lisa rolled her eyes. "So you can beat up a bunch of idiots, big deal."

Harry grumbled about how girls could never understand a thing about his desire to train.

XoX

Other than that he spent several hours at the dojo, making sure to use the time he had with Master Wei to get in a real work-out, something he simply couldn't do at Hogwarts. Harry had for a time entertained thoughts of creating a class that taught hand-to-hand combat, but had eventually discarded the idea as unrealistic. Aside from the fact that most wizards, minus a few like Oliver Wood who were just freaky in how much they exercised, were generally lazy and in absolutely terrible shape. They tended to rely on their magic for everything and neglected to train their bodies.

With Christmas coming up soon Harry decided it was time to head over to Diagon Alley to get some magical shopping done. After finishing his exercises and taking a shower and getting dressed in a long cloak with a hood he left a note on the dining room table:

Gone to get something from one of the stores we shopped at.

Be back soon.

Harry.

He went to the park, which was always empty this early in the morning and apparated away. His point of apparation was a small alleyway located in the dark, near the abandoned streets of Knockturn Alley.

Knockturn Alley was a shopping area off Diagon Alley in London. It was filled with shops devoted to the Dark Arts, including Borgin and Burkes, which specialized in objects with curious and strong magical properties. It wasn't very hard to find unusual and dangerous people walking around there.

Harry flipped up the hood of his cloak and cast a small charm on his eyes to make them glow blood red while hiding the rest of his face. This served the purpose of allowing him to silently move through the alley, avoiding people who might try to steal from him or worse with a simple glare and some intimidation tactics. When he left the dark alley and entered Diagon he lifted the hood off his face to reveal his eyes were now blue, he had blond hair and the scar on his forehead was hidden.

Setting off Harry's first stop was a small jewellery store that he had seen when he first entered the alley. It was a little out of the way, and fairly small, with only a small selection of jewellery, most of it subpar. The jewellery made by muggles was of much better quality. However the woman who manned the store was an enchantress and could enchant items with powerful charms that would serve some kind of function.

"Can I help you, young man?" asked the woman. She had dark reddish brown hair and pale blue eyes and was wearing a dark blue robe.

"Yes," Harry brought out several items, "what kind of enchantments can you do?"

The woman smiled at him. "I can do many kinds, it depends on what you want. However, the most popular ones are enchantments that allow items to never get dirty or ones that always let you know where they are located. We have a few that can detect foreign substances in food, others that can create a minor shielding charm against weaker curses, the possibilities are only limited by what your imagination can come up with and the power of the enchanter."



Harry nodded, he had read a little on enchanting, it was a branch of charms that involved imbuing magic into an item. It was a tricky bit of magic that required a lot more focus and intent than any other branch of magic aside from some of the more advanced forms of transfiguration.

"Then would it be possible to get these items charmed with these sets of charms?" asked Harry as he held out a parchment for the witch to take.

Her eyes strolled over the parchment and seemed to become alight with interest. "These are some rather impressive enchantments, this many will take a bit more time than usual as it will take a lot of magic, especially for the number of items."

"How long do you think it will take?" asked Harry curiously.

"An entire day."

Harry clicked his tongue a bit in thought. "Then would it be alright if you enchant them tomorrow? I have some other things I need to get and am interested in seeing how enchantments are done."

The woman gave him an appraising eye, obviously sizing him up by his last statement, it wasn't often that someone so young took an interest in enchanting, or any of the higher branches of magic really.

"I can do that," she said. "It will take all day, I open at six."

"Thank you," Harry said, grabbing the items he had brought and placing them back the pockets of his robe.

Harry's next stop was Flourish & Blott's, since Hermione was a muggle-born he felt that getting her something from the wizarding world would be more appreciated and since she had a love for books that rivaled his own it was all too obvious what he would get her.

After spending nearly half an hour looking around the book store Harry ended up going to the person who was manning the front desk. "Excuse me, I was wondering if you had any rare books on magic, maybe something to do with the theories behind charms or Transfiguration?"

"I'm sorry sir," the front desk clerk, a bald man with a graying beard said. "But we don't carry rare books, only the kinds we can buy in bulk."

"I see," Harry sighed, "thank you anyways."

He left the store and took to walking around for a few minutes until he found an interesting looking antique store. When he entered the first thing he noticed was that it was cluttered with all kinds of knick-knacks that Harry had no clue what they did. Some of them whirred, others whizzed and all of them seemed to serve no purpose other than to draw the eye to them.

Harry walked up to the aging man at the back table. "Excuse me," he said, "I was wondering if you had any rare books on magic?"

The man looked up at him and frowned. "I might, but if we're going to do business than you had better take off your glamour charms. I won't sell to a fraud."

It was a bit surprising that the man could see through his charms, most average witches and wizards never noticed things like that. It took someone with an innate understanding of magic to be able to sense when it was surrounding objects and people like a glamour did.

With a small sigh Harry waved his mother's wand over his face and revealed himself to the man.

"Harry Potter," he mused as he eyed the scar, "I would question how you are able to do magic outside of school..." He paused and Harry wondered what he was thinking, then he shrugged, "but since most of the purebloods let their little snots practice I won't."

Harry chuckled, "That would be much appreciated. So do you think you could help me?"

"I may have something," the old man replied as he stood up from his stool. "All of my more interesting items are in the back."

He moved a small book shelf in the far back of the room to reveal a door. Opening it, he motioned Harry to follow him and they moved

down a small, narrow corridor. They came to another door and passed through that, stepping out into a room that was much more organized than the other part of the store. Several shelves lined the walls, containing various items, goblets that held what looked like family crests, a few swords and other weapons and old looking books bound in leather.

"What sort of books are you looking for?" asked the old man.

"I was hoping something about the history or theory behind magic," said Harry. "Maybe something left behind by a famous witch or wizard that hasn't been released."

"Hmm..." the old man rubbed his chin. "I may have something." He went over to one of his bookshelves and grabbed a small worn book, blowing on it a bit to clear off the dust it gathered. He came back and showed it to Harry. "This book is the personal journal of Rowena Ravenclaw, it has many notes and theories behind a lot of the magic we take for granted today. I myself have only read bits of it, even I can't understand more than a few parts."

The old man let Harry look it over, reading the first few pages. "It's perfect," he breathed, "where did you find it?"

"Believe it or not I found it during an excursion into the muggle world. It was in a library, charmed with a muggle-notice-me-not charm." The man shrugged, "I have no idea how it got there but since it was, I figured it would be best not to let it just sit there for all eternity."

"Before I sell this, may I ask why you are so interested in buying it?"

Harry looked up and said, "I have a friend, a muggle-born friend who loves to read. She's fairly talented and seems to have a knack for learning complicated theory. I was hoping to get her something for Christmas."

The man raised an eyebrow. "This book is pretty expensive for a mere present."

"You can't buy friends," Harry said. "Something like this is a pittance compared to having friends who are willing to stick with you."

The man smiled, "A good answer. Come, I'll ring you up."

Harry blinked at the muggle phrase before following the man back to the front of the store.

"The cost will be ten thousand galleons," said the old man.

Harry raised an eyebrow but knew that something belonging to the Founders would be expensive. He pulled out his Gringotts money pouch and counted ten thousand galleons.

"Thank you for your business, Mr. Potter," said the old man.

"No problem," Harry said. He paused and looked at the men, "I get the feeling you don't often sell those items in the back."

"Aye."

"So why did you sell me this book?"

The man seemed to think for a second. "All of my family was killed by You-Know-Who and his Death Eaters before you vanquished him. I guess you can consider this my thank you."

"I didn't actually do anything," said Harry.

"Oh?" the man raised an eyebrow.

"I was one," Harry said, shrugging as if that explained everything. And in a way it did. "The way everyone speaks about it, they make it sound like I had some epic clash with against Voldemort in a one-on-one duel. In truth, I think it's more likely that my parents did something, and I was just the catalyst for his demise."

"Well it's good to see you keep your head out of the clouds," the old man joked to try and get over the shock of hearing someone so callously throw the Dark Lord's name around. He shrugged, "then you can consider this a gift for the sacrifice you and your family made."

Harry nodded and smiled, "Thank you. If you find any other books of interest, and are planning on selling, please let me know."

"I will," the man replied as Harry walked out of the store.

XoX

I'm sure some of you will notice that I changed Sensei to Sifu, which I found online is the Chinese word for Teacher, along with Kai, which in Japanese means release and in Chinese apparently it means start. Though considering there were at least six different ways to say teacher in Chinese that I found that's not saying much. I will at some point in time go back to my second chapter and change the words from Japanese to Chinese.

Anyways I hope you all enjoyed the chapter.

## Chapter 10: Christmas

XoX

"Come on, Padma! Get up! It's Christmas! Get up!"

Padma groaned as she listened to her over reactive sister shouting at her and attempted to bury her head into her pillow.

"Padma, get your lazy butt out of bed!"

"Sleepy... five more minutes," Padma groaned from underneath her pillow.

Parvati scowled as she grabbed the pillow and yanked it off her sister's head, threw it across the floor and jumped on to Padma's bed. "Get up, now! Mum won't allow me to open presents without you!"

Padma sighed as she sat up in bed and stretched out. Sometimes, most of the time, her sister could be so annoying. She ignored her sister's cries of "Hurry up Padma" as she slowly rose out of bed and walked into the bathroom where she got ready for the day. A quick shower later, Padma was dressed and coming down a set of stairs with her sister.

"Good morning Padma, Parvati," her mother called out from in the kitchen as she and Parvati entered the living room where the Christmas tree was located. "Breakfast is almost ready so you two grab a plate and sit down."

"Ok mum!" Parvati said cheerfully.

"K," Padma said with a soft yawn, she and her sister sat down next to their father who was reading the business section of the Daily Prophet ("The only thing this rag has right," he would often say). "Morning dad."

"Good morning, Pad," he said, bringing his cup of coffee to his lips and taking a sip. "Sleep well?"

"I would have if Parvati wasn't so loud last night," Padma complained softly.

"I wasn't that loud," Parvati said in defense of the non stop shouting she had done, "and besides it's Christmas, I was excited and so am entitled to be a little..."

"Rambunctious?" Padma suggested when she noticed her sisters face scrunch up.

Parvati nodded, "Yes."

Padma just sighed as their mother came in, humming a little tune to herself as she floated the food, luchi-kochuri (stuffed luchis), puffed rice crisps with milk, jaggery and fruits, a traditional Indian breakfast, onto the table. "After breakfast we'll open presents," her mother said as she sat down.

"Yeah!" Parvati exclaimed excitedly as she dug into her food. Padma ate food silently and slowly, absently trying to figure out what she had gotten for Christmas.

After Breakfast they all moved to couch in the living room next to the Christmas tree. Parvati dove into the presents, grabbing several and passing them out with enthusiasm before tearing into one of her own with reckless abandon.

Padma opened her presents much more slowly than her twin, unwrapping them carefully so she didn't rip the wrapping. She had ended up getting some clothes, a lot of books on magic, poetry and plays and a charmed pendant of Shiva, a major Hindu Deity. Parvati ended up getting several dozen different outfits that were supposed to be the latest fashion and several books on fashion. Honestly, the clothing looked the same now as clothing did several hundred years ago so Padma had no clue why it would be considered the latest of anything, but her sister loved it.

"Thank you mum, dad," Padma gave both her parents a big hug.

"So you enjoyed the presents?" asked Mr. Patil.

"I love them."

"Me too!" added Parvati.

Just then a tapping on the window stole their attention; they all turned to see a beautiful snowy white owl sitting on the window sill, looking at them with intelligent amber eyes.

"That's Harry's owl!" Padma gasped as she ran over to the window and opened it. Hedwig flew in and dropped a small package on the table.

"Harry?" asked Mrs. Patil.

"Harry Potter," answered Parvati with a small scowl, "he's friends with my sister."

"You could be friends with him to if you spent more time talking to him and less time giggling at him," Padma said.

"You mean the-boy-who-lived?" asked Mr. Patil.

"Don't let him hear you call him that," Padma said with a smile, "he absolutely hates that title."

"He does?" asked her mother in confusion.

Padma nodded, "I remember the first time I called him that and he scowled at me and went into this whole speech about how there was no way a one year old boy could possibly defeat you-know-who. Harry thinks his parents did something to the dark lord and he was just the catalyst that ended in you-know-who's defeat."

"Well, at least he sounds modest," Mrs. Patil said.

"He is," Padma agreed, "he's the best student in our year but he never lets it go to his head, and he's always willing to help others with their work."

"So what did he bring?" asked Mr. Patil.

"I don't know," Padma took the package, there was a small note on it that she picked up and read out loud:

"Dear Padma,



I know how much you love poetry and figured you might like to read some from the other side. I hope you enjoy.

Sincerely,

Harry J. Potter

P.S. Get one of your parents to use the finite spell to un-shrink the package to receive your present."

"What does he mean by 'the other side'?" asked Parvati.

"Obviously he's talking about muggles," said Padma, looking at her mother. "Mum?"

"Right dear," Mrs. Patil tapped the package with her wand and cast a finite command, making the package grow and expand until it was normal sized.

Padme slowly unwrapped the gift wrapping to see a book, it looked much different than wizarding books, which were always old and bound in rough leather (if they weren't the kind that tried to eat you or some such). This book was shiny and new, there was no binding that Padma could see holding the pages together, except for some sticky looking material that was attached to the end of the pages and back of the cover. The title read One Thousand Famous Poems and had pictures (that didn't move) on the front.

"That's an odd looking book," Pavarti commented as Padme opened it and read the first poem she found.

"It looks newer then wizarding books," Mr. Patil commented. "How is it."

Padme smiled as she flipped the page, "I can tell you that muggles write far better poetry then we do. Some of the artistic liberties they take with words is very impressive."

"Figures you'd be impressed by words," Parvati grumbled.

"You're just jealous because Harry Potter bought me a gift."

Parvati's face flushed bright red with jealousy and anger, "Am not!"

"~are too!~"

XoX

Hermione Granger woke up extra early as Christmas morning came. After getting ready quickly she ran down the stairs where her mom, Emma Granger, was already up and cooking a full English breakfast. "Good morning, mum! Merry Christmas!" she greeted.

"Good morning Hermione," Emma said with a smile, happy to see her daughter so alive. Ever since they had left King's Cross she had seen the difference between her slightly depressed and lonely daughter from before, and the new one that seemed to have come back with them.

Emma and her husband Christopher had been subject to listening the girl prattle on and on about her new school. That wasn't much of a surprise, her daughter loved books and learning more than anything in the world and was one of the most intelligent girls her age. What had been a surprise was how she spoke of all the friends she had made, Emma knew her daughter had a some troubles making friends in the past, she had comforted Hermione many times after one of the kids in her class had insulted her for being a bookworm, or for her teeth. This year, Hermione had not been talking about her school as much, rather she told him about Harry Potter.

Apparently the boy was a big celebrity in the magical world, famous for surviving a supposedly un-survivable dark curse that instantly killed whoever it was cast on. Emma was dismayed when Hermione told her about the dark wizard who apparently had been so frightening and evil that he was only known as you-know-who or he-who-must-not-be-named due to the unspeakable horrors he had inflicted on the wizarding world. This evil wizard had also affected the so called muggle world, Emma remembered when many muggles went missing, how whole towns would turn up destroyed on the news who would claim it was a tornado or some such.

It was frightening to learn that all that destruction was actually caused by a wizard, one with some a hatred for non-magical humans. Then to learn that the only reason he was defeated was because he tried to kill a young boy, a child of one, was a shock and

Emma couldn't help but feel terrible for the young boy who had so much placed on him.

Of course, listening to Hermione talk about the boy made it seem like he was the second coming of Merlin (Muggles knew about Merlin, even if he was just a myth to them) and he was apparently even more of an academic achiever than Hermione. Top of his classes, friendly and liked by just about everyone, didn't care about house prejudice (she had to ask what the houses were and why there would be prejudice) and also very athletic and a Quidditch Prodigy (Hermione gave her a near hour lecture on the sport). More than half of what her daughter told her about was the amazingness of Harry Potter.

The sound of steps coming down the stairs brought her attention to the present.

"Morning Honey, Hermione," said Christopher as he entered the room, giving her a kiss and ruffling Hermione's hair.

"Merry Christmas dad."

"Merry Christmas dear."

Breakfast at the Grangers was talkative affair, Hermione did all the talking, while Mr. and Mrs. Granger listened on in amusement.

"And Harry created this one room we all call the House Common Room for all Houses, it's like a clubhouse for anyone who wants to spend time together, regardless of what house you're from. I'm planning on contributing some story books for the library so some of the purebloods can learn a little more about muggle society..." Hermione started telling them about the common room, and what she and her other friends had done there. It was very heartwarming to hear that their daughter had such good friends now.

After Breakfast Hermione and her parents sat in front of the Christmas Tree and began opening presents. Most of what Hermione got were books, story books, math books, science books, it didn't really matter so long as she had something to read she was happy. There were a few other presents as well, clothes, some interesting items from relatives and the like, but that was the gist of it.

"Hermione, there's one more present for you here?" Emma said as she found a small box wrapped in red and gold paper hidden within the tree.

Hermione took the present and looked at it, aside from the wrapping there was just a card with her name on it. she took the card and opened it, gasping a bit when she read it.

"Who's it from, Hermione?" asked Christopher.

"It's from Harry!"

The two adults looked at each other as Hermione read the card:

"Dear Hermione,

I know how much you love reading theory, this book I got you is a book that has all of the theory about many of the spells witches and wizards use in everyday life. It's a little old, so try to be careful with it.

Sincerely,

Harry J. Potter.

Hermione tore into the wrapping with fervor and pulled out an old leather bound book. There was no title on the front page, just a name, one that made her gasp. "This is written by Rowena Ravenclaw!" Hermione exclaimed. "One of the four founders of Hogwarts! This book must be the only copy in existence!"

"So it's a good read?" asked Christopher, who was promptly ignored as Hermione forgot about everything else while she began to read.

"I don't think she can hear you anymore dear," replied an amused Emma.

"I figured that," he replied dryly.

XoX

"Daphne come down for Christmas!" said an excited Astoria Greengrass as she climbed onto her sister's bed and shook her.

"In a minute Stori," Daphne moaned lightly, rolling onto her back and pushing herself into a sitting position. She stretched herself out, looking very much like a cat as she stretched her arms over her head and her legs out as far as they could go.

"Come on," Astoria urged her older sister, trying to get out of bed.

"I said in a minute," Daphne said as she stood up. "I need to take a shower, why don't you wait downstairs for me?" she asked with a smile.

Astoria nodded eagerly, "k!"

Daphne watched in amusement as her little sister ran out of the room before making her way into the bathroom. She turned on the hot water, quickly divested her clothes and stepped into the warm water. Closing her eyes a content sigh escaped her lips as she spent several long, luxurious minutes letting the water hit her back. As she stood there her thoughts turned to her most recent friend.

Even after a week of thought she couldn't help but wonder about the sudden change in her thoughts on Harry Potter. When they had first been starting, all anyone could talk about was that he would coming to Hogwarts that year. Even Tracey had been all googly eyed and dreamy at the thought of meeting the famous Boy-Who-Lived.

Unlike her friend Daphne had not been looking forward to meeting the famous boy, believing that he would be nothing more than an arrogant child filled with disillusion about his greatness.

That first belief had been more or less shattered during there first meeting when he tore down all of the stories that had been told about him. He basically informed them that everything they read about him was a lie. She would not admit it, even to herself, but that first meeting had made her curious about Harry.

Then he had gotten sorted into Gryffindor and she had lost all interest, believing that he would be just like every other arrogant and obnoxious prat in that house.

The days had worn on and she had more or less forgotten about him. Only really remembering him when Draco complained and moaned about the boy, and told everyone how he would get back at the

raven haired youth after telling his father about whatever incident happened at the time. Tracey also complained a bit, having hoped Harry would be in her house. But Daphne hadn't really paid attention to her when she mentioned his name.

Then Harry had done something she would not have expected anyone to do, especially not from Gryffindor. He had invited her, Tracey and Blaise to study with them. The boy who by all rights should be the enemy of every Slytherin (if you were to listen to the Death Eater children) had apparently not forgotten about them and offered them a chance to spend time with him.

Tracey had been ecstatic, Daphne had been wary. She had tried many times to get her best friend to reconsider spending time with Harry, claiming it could be a trap to humiliate them (he had done it to Draco often enough). But Tracey wouldn't budge.

Well, she wasn't going to let her best friend go spend time with a Gryffindor alone (she conveniently forgot about Blaise), and had decided to tag along. She wouldn't admit to herself at the time that she had also been curious about the boy.

The next few days had been confusing for the blond pureblood witch. Harry had never made any move against them, had treated them the same way he did everyone else, and had even humored Tracey when she teased him. In short, he was nothing like she had expected. That still didn't mean she was going to trust him.

She had kept her distance from the group, even her best friend. With Tracey spending more time with Harry, Daphne had not really spent much time with her. Those several hours where her friend had decided to spend time with Harry when Daphne was in the Slytherin Common room had given the blond girl plenty of time to herself. Time which she had used to explore the uninhabited halls of the castle.

Then she had found the mirror and her life had begun to revolve around it. The image the mirror had conjured was something she had buried deep within herself, hidden behind her icy and cold persona. It had been something she had done her best to forget; no one, not even Tracey knew about it and she had wanted to keep it that way. She had even gone so far as to snap at her friend when asked about it.

Every night for nearly two weeks she would sit and stare at the mirror, her longing and anguish had been her only companions during that time.

Then Harry Potter had come onto the scene, like some kind of bloody prince from a stupid fairy-tale story he had come to her in an attempt to help. Daphne hadn't been stupid, having been forced to raise Astoria without the help a mother and father since she was six, she had been forced to grow up faster than her friends. The moment he came in she knew that Tracey had been the one to let him know something was wrong with her.

Well, she certainly hadn't been going to give him the satisfaction of letting him help her in anyway. She was perfectly capable of taking care of herself. And when she got back that night she was going to lay into Tracey for getting a bloody Gryffindor to come find her.

But there was something different that night. Maybe she had just been exhausted, or maybe it was because the mental defenses she had placed around her mind had been taking a two week beating. Whatever the answer was, he had offered her a helping hand.

Despite her reservations she had taken it.

She had told him everything.

Oddly enough she had felt much better after getting her burden off her chest. She had never told anyone else about her feelings, how could she? She needed to be strong, she had a sister to take care of, a naive best friend to look after, and several dozen housemates that would sooner stab you in the back then help you. She needed to be strong, not just for herself, but for her sister and best friend too.

Somehow Harry had penetrated her defenses, that cold outer exterior she presented to the world. She had wanted to tell herself that it had been because her defenses had already been down, but that would be a lie. There was something about Harry that made her trust him that night, she had felt a kindred spirit in him. Even though he had only been one, he knew what it was like to lose your parents.

So she had told him of her deepest secret, her greatest desire, and she had felt better.

She had been in for another surprise.

Harry Potter had reciprocated, of a sort.

She knew the boy wasn't all that he seemed, others might have missed it but Daphne had seen the calculating gleam in his eyes. Harry had plans for Hogwarts, and likely the wizarding world as a whole. What those plans were and what his friends had to do with it she didn't know. But she knew the boy hid a lot more about himself than he let on.

Which was why she had been surprised when Harry told her a little about his parents. It hadn't escaped her notice that he rarely, if ever, talked about himself. According to Susan and Hannah, Harry had once tore into one Ronald Weasley for asking him about the death of his parents. That he would tell her a little of what he knew about them had been shocking, and in a way heartwarming since she knew he hadn't told anyone else.

She had gone to bed that night feeling better than she had in two weeks. Though she had still been rather tired, as the embarrassing situation she found herself in on the train could attest to. Even more embarrassing was that it was with the boy she had been very cold to, even more so than the others.

The boy who also managed to gain her trust and friendship in the span of a single night.

With a light blush on her face, Daphne turned off the water, dried off, combed her hair and got dressed. She made her way down the stairs and into the living room where several presents were set up.

As a family that has always carried on with pureblood traditions there was no Christmas tree, the House of Greengrass did not celebrate Christmas, instead they chose to celebrate Yuletide. Really it was no different from Christmas anymore, her father was just adamant on calling it by the pureblood holiday, no one actually celebrated the true Yule anymore.

Like always her father was not there this morning, he had likely gotten up early and left for work like he had done every year for the past three years. A glint of sadness entered her eyes but she shook



it off as Astoria bounded up to her, grabbed her by the hand and began pulling her towards the wrapped boxes.

"Come on, Daphne, let's open presents," she said.

"Alright, alright," Daphne smiled at her younger sister. Her sister had been her one bright spot when they were younger and could always bring a smile to her face. "Which one do you want to open first?"

"This one!"

The two sisters spent the next half hour opening presents. Most of them were from their father, who had bought them expensive clothing, or toys. A few were from their friends. Blaise sent Daphne several of her favorite sugar quills, and Tracey sent her a bracelet with several charms of moons and stars on it. As she was setting some of the presents aside she saw another one, hidden under one of the large boxes Astoria had opened.

Curious she picked it up, the wrapping was in green and silver striped paper and the stripes had been charmed to make them writhe and move like a snake.

"What'cha got there?" asked Astoria, seeing Daphne staring at the small package in her hands. "Who's it from?"

"I don't know," Daphne said as she took the small card attached to it.

"Dear Daphne,

I wasn't really sure what to get you, I guess that's my fault since I never really asked. Still, I hope you like the present, I got it custom made in jewellery store and enchanted by an enchantress. If you wear it, whenever you are near a foreign substance, whether it's in your food or in the air, this will grow warm and glow a silvery-green.

Sincerely,

Harry J. Potter."

She unwrapped the paper to reveal a small box, opening it. Sitting there on a plush, dark green pillow was the most beautiful pendant she had ever laid eyes on. The necklace was made of small gold

chains while the pendant was two snakes, made from a blend of silver and gold that were woven together like thin threads, that twisted around each other into a heart. In the mouths of the two snakes were two small diamonds cut in the shape of initials, D & G.

"Wow," Astoria breathed as she saw the small necklace dangling from Daphne's hands. "It's so pretty."

Daphne stared at the pendant, bringing it up to her eyes to look at it. Pretty didn't even begin to describe how beautiful it was, she had never seen such fine craftsmanship before. The pendant was good enough to be of the same quality as Goblin-made jewels.

"Daphne, why are you crying?" asked Astoria.

"Hm?" Daphne wiped at her eyes, noticing the moisture that was now on her hand, "I'm not crying."

"You look like you are."

"Shut up, Stori," Daphne mumbled, a small smile on her face as she looked at the necklace, her thoughts going out to a certain raven haired boy who had managed to worm his way into her confidence.

XoX

Susan Amelia bones woke up with a loud yawn, sitting up in bed and casting a look around her room. She swung her legs over the side of her bed and stretched a bit before getting up and moving to the restroom so she could take a long soak in a hot bath, the one thing women of all ages enjoyed.

When she finished her soak and got dressed she rushed down the stairs to find her Aunt, Amelia Bones, already sitting at the table in the kitchen, sipping some coffee and reading the Daily Prophet.

"Good morning, Auntie," said Susan as she sat down at the table.

"Actually it's nearly twelve o'clock, so technically it's not really morning anymore," Amelia replied with a small, amused smile.

"What? B-but why didn't you wake me?" asked Susan with a dismayed look. A house elf appeared and with a snap of its fingers a small plate with an English breakfast appeared. "Thank you Haimy."

The House elf bowed and disappeared with a soft pop.

Amelia smiled, "I did, I woke you up five times this morning. Each time you said 'five more minutes auntie' so I figured I'd let you wake up on your own. Perhaps you shouldn't have stayed up so late last night."

"But I was excited," Susan pouted a bit before she dug into her breakfast. She swallowed some of the eggs and added, "after all, it's Christmas and Hannah and her family is coming over in..." she blinked as she realized just how late it really was, "in just a few minutes, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Amelia before another house elf popped in.

"Mistress, the Abbotts are here," the House elf said.

"Thank you," Amelia stood up, "please let direct them towards the living room."

As the House elf popped away Amelia and Susan made their way into the living room, a few seconds later Hannah and Mr. and Mrs. Abbott joined them.

"Katherin, it's good to see you," Amelia said, a smile on her face as she watched Susan greet her best childhood friend.

"And you as well," replied Katherin. She was a pretty blond woman with a simple elegance about her. "I hope the Ministry doesn't have you working too hard."

"Not recently," Amelia said, "there hasn't been anything that really requires my attention anymore except a few incidents."

"Hey, Su, check it out!" Hannah held up her wrist to reveal a golden bracelet with several small diamonds on the top, bottom, left and right sides, each one in the shape of an H. "Check out what Harry got me!"

"Harry got you that?" asked Susan, blinking at the pretty bracelet. "I wonder if he got me anything?"

Hannah looked over at the Christmas tree and saw all of the presents still unopened. "You slept in late again, didn't you?" she asked, though it was more rhetorical than anything.

Susan blushed embarrassedly, "I was really excited last night."

"As you were last year, and the year before that," said Hannah in amusement. "You very terrible when it comes to dealing with your excitement." Susan blushed again before Hannah began pushing her to the tree, "well come on, you have some presents to open."

Amelia and Mr. and Mrs. Abbot watched as Susan began to open presents.

"So have you heard about Hannah and Susan's new friend?" asked Mrs. Abbott with some amusement.

"You mean Harry Potter?" asked Amelia. "Yes, in fact, I met him at Kings Cross the day I came to pick up Hannah and Susan."

"So it's true then?" asked Mr. Abbott. "Harry Potter's really going to Hogwarts?"

"It is," said Amelia.

"I had thought it was a rumor," said Mr. Abbott. "Of course, Hannah kept talking about him, but I had not really been sure I believed her."

"So what's he like?" asked Mrs. Abbott. "Is he anything like James? Or Lily?"

"I didn't spend quite enough time to get a read on him," replied Amelia. "However, he was very polite. He also seemed quite popular, Susan hasn't been able to stop talking about how amazing he is."

"Hannah as well," said Mr. Abbott. "She is quite taken in with him, always talking about how awesome he is, and how powerful he is."

"Hey, Auntie!" Susan ran up to the group of adults with Hannah slightly behind her. "Look at what Harry got me! a charmed brooch."

Susan held up a small golden brooch that was in the shape of several red roses made out of rubies. They glowed softly in the light, as if the magic on them was so powerful it was visible.

"Are those rubies?" asked Amelia as she studied the roses.

"Most likely," Mrs. Abbott said. "He got Hannah something with diamonds."

"Isn't it pretty?" asked Susan, smiling brightly at her aunt.

"It's very beautiful, Susan," Amelia said as she grabbed it and brushed Susan's hair from her face. "Here, let me help you put it in your hair."

XoX

"Harry!" Lisa shouted as she barged into the guest room, "get up, Harry! It's Christmas!"

"I'm already awake," a voice said from behind her.

Lisa turned around. "Oh, sorry I – Kya! What are you doing standing naked in the hall! Put some clothes on!"

Harry frowned as he looked at his towel clad form, then at Lisa. "I just got out of the shower," he said dryly. "I was going to get dressed when you barged into the room."

"Oh..." she looked at him for several seconds before seeming to remember he was naked and blushed. "Then go get changed! And get out of the hallway."

Harry sighed, "Then could get out of the doorway?"

Lisa squeaked and turned bright red as she ran back down the hallways. Harry shook his head at how overly excited his friend was, she had done this several times when he had spent the night and it no longer bothered him like it did her. Though that could be because he always had the memories in mind and eventually got desensitized towards this particular occurrence.

He moved over to the dresser and pulled out some clothes. After quickly getting dressed in a pair of light blue jeans and a sleeveless green shirt with a black jacket thrown over it, he was soon entering the small living room where the tree they had gotten last week was stationed.

"Come on, hurry up, Harry!" Lisa said, waving from where she sat by the Christmas tree.

"I'm coming, keep your pants on," Harry said as he walked over to her and plopped down.

"Open this one first!" Lisa forcefully shoved a small gift wrapped box into his hands.

"Right."

Over on the couch Mr. and Mrs. Crawft sat looking amused as Lisa told Harry which presents to open first. Harry ended up getting several pairs of clothing, jeans in different colors and fades, a blazer and several collared shirts.

"Do you like it?" asked Lisa, suddenly seeming shy as Harry finished opening her present. She had given him a small yin & yang pendant. "I thought it might be something you wanted, you know, because it goes with your karate stuff."

Harry smiled as he placed the pendant around his neck, smiled and pulled Lisa into a hug. "I love it," he said, she always got nervous whenever she gave Harry a present, no matter whether it was for Christmas or his birthday. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Lisa said with a large, relieved grin.

"Now I think it's time you opened my present," Harry brought out a box wrapped in shiny green paper and handed it to Lisa.

She took it curiously, looking at it for a minute before shaking it. She stuck her tongue out at Harry when he began to laugh and ripped the wrapping paper off, then opened the small box and opened it.

"It's the latest dress from Gucci!" Lisa gasped.

"I saw you looking at it when we were shopping the first day and asked them to make it in your size," said Harry.

"Oh thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" Lisa tackled Harry to the ground and began to hug him hard enough that the raven haired boy thought her heard his back crack. "I can't believe you got this for me! Thank you so much!" she kissed him on the cheek and quickly stood up, grabbing the dress and bolting to try it on.

Harry sighed as he sat back up and waited for Lisa to come back in, she would want to give him and her parents a show with her new clothes he knew, she did that every time she got new clothes.

"Looks like we've got another new photo for the wall dear," Mrs. Crawft said with some amusement. Harry looked over at her to see her waving a photo in one hand and was holding a camera in the other. He groaned, he hadn't even noticed the flash.

"Looks like it honey," Mr. Crawft replied. "I can't wait to show this picture to the Stellairs."

"Could you two please not talk about how you're going to try and embarrass me and Lisa by showing pictures of me and your daughter to people I don't even know?" asked Harry. "Besides, you've got worse pictures then that."

"Then I suppose you won't mind if we post it on the wall," Mrs. Crawft said, standing up and making her way out.

"Wait! I didn't say I want it on there!" Harry shouted. He was about to chase after her when a feminine voice spoke up.

"Hey, hey Harry, how do I look?" asked Lisa.

Harry turned to her and blinked for several seconds as he stared at his friend in her new dress. it was a long, red dress that ran all the way to the bottom with a small slit along the left side that stopped just a little above her knees. The dress was sleeveless with some small frills and had a V-cut in the back.

"You look, really pretty, Lisa," said Harry. Well, he thought cute would be a more accurate word, she was simply too young to fill out a dress like that, but from the way her face began to beam at him he

knew that his description, while not as accurate, it was certainly the right thing to say.

"Do you really think so?" she asked, spinning around for him.

"Of course I do," said Harry.

"Thank you so much for getting me this, Harry," she said again. "My parents would have never gotten me a dress like this."

"Your right, we wouldn't," said Mr. Crawft as he and Mrs. Crawft re-entered the room. "You're far too young to be wearing something like that."

"I'm twelve years old dad!" Lisa said with a huff.

"And that's still six years too young," he replied.

"Though you do look splendid," Mrs. Crawft said, seeing a father daughter fight coming and moving to stop it before it started.

"Thank you, mum," she said, tossing her dad a small glare.

"I guess she's getting into that rebellious stage," Mr. Crawft mumbled too low for anyone else to hear.

After presents the family of three plus Harry spent their time watching movies and just having a good time. Harry had always loved Christmas after he had befriended Lisa, after learning that he never received any presents from his aunt or uncle she had insisted that he spend it with her family. That had actually been the first time he had met her parents, though despite him having just met them they had already known about him from Lisa.

"Well, now that Christmas is over is there anything you kids want to do during the rest of the hols?" asked Mrs. Crawft.

Harry and Lisa looked at each other for a second or two before nodding. They turned to Lisa's parents and at the same time said, "Camelot Theme Park!"

XoX



It was several days later when Harry and the Crawfts got into Mr. Crawfts car and began the drive to Camelot, a muggle resort and theme park located in the English county of Lancashire. It was based on the legend of Camelot and King Aruthur. During the ride Lisa and Harry spoke of all the rides they would go on, Harry wanted to ride the thrill rides like the Whirlpool, Knightmare, and Excalibur. However, Lisa wanted to go on the Galleon, Falcon's Flight and the Go Karts.

As soon as Mr. Crawft parked the car Harry and Lisa ran towards the ticket booth, getting a spot in line as the two adults made a more leisurely pace. They waited for several long minutes before they reached the end of the line and bought four tickets.

"Alright you two, I figure you're going to go running off as soon as we get inside," Mr. Crawft said as they passed through the gate. "So I want you to meet us here in three hours and stick together, ok?"

"Ok!" said Lisa.

"Got it," Harry replied before Lisa grabbed his hand and began running off. "Hey – hey, slow down, Lisa!"

"We're doing Go Karts first!" Lisa said.

"What? But I wanted to ride the Excalibur!" Harry complained. "Go Karts are so boring!"

"Why would you want to go on the Excalibur? It looks scary," Lisa said.

"That's exactly why," said Harry. "Because its fast, and has enough twists and turns to make my stomach fly into my throat and get my adrenaline pumping in almost the same way sparring does."

"Ugh, you and your sparring," Lisa grumbled. "Well whatever, you can go on your scary ride after the Go Karts."

"But –"

"Please?" Lisa turned to him, holding her hands out in front of her as she looked at Harry with a pair of large, watery eyes.

"But – I –" Harry sighed and his shoulders slumped in defeat, "fine."

"Alright!" Lisa cheered as she grabbed Harry's hand again and ran towards the Go Karts line.

Harry grinned as he got into his Kart, the wait hadn't been that long, and looked over at Lisa. "So, loser has to buy the winner a Churo?" he asked.

Lisa answered his grin with a smile. "I guess, just don't be too upset when you lose," she said.

When the light on the small pole turned green Harry, Lisa and all the other Go Karts moved. Harry slammed on the gas pedal and began speeding through the course, weaving through the throng of Go Karts that were ahead of him. As he was passing a red Kart a bright blue one passed him and a voice spoke out.

"You'll never catch me, Harry!" Lisa shouted as she waved from her Kart and sped ahead.

Harry growled a bit as he felt his competitive nature rise up and began to push his Kart harder. Unfortunately, Lisa had always been better with Go Karts or anything that needed to be driven and he never caught up to her.

XoX

"I can't believe I lost," Harry whined as he gave Lisa one of the Churros he had paid for.

"You should," Lisa said, she took a bite of the gooey cinnamony goodness and made appreciative noises. "After all, I beat you at Go Karts the last time, and the time before that, and the one before that too."

"Yeah, whatever," Harry grumped, sulking about her superior driving skills.

"There, there," Lisa pat him on the head, "I'm sure you'll do better next time."

Harry sulked a bit more before a gleam entered his eyes. "Since we've now done something you want, we're going to go on one of the rides I want," he said.

"Which one do you want to go on?" asked Lisa.

"That one," Harry pointed to a metal monstrosity that had more twists, turns, loops and sheer drops that Lisa felt sick just looking at it.

"D – Do you really want to go on this one, Harry?" she asked. "Couldn't we find another ride? Like the Cup & Sorcerer."

"Ah, ah," Harry wagged a finger at her, "you remember how this goes, you got to choose a ride, so now I get one."

"Right," Lisa gulped.

XoX

"Relax will you?" said Harry as he and Lisa were getting strapped into their seats on the Excalibur II.

"A-are you sure this is safe?" asked Lisa who was shaking against her harness. "I mean, t-this ride looks really dangerous."

"Yeah, it's perfectly safe," said Harry, he yawned and leaned back in his seat. "Don't worry about a thing, no one's ever died on this ride or anything."

"Oh, well that's good," mumbled Lisa in a dry, sarcastic tone.

Harry just smiled, "yep, so don't worry about a thing."

The ride soon started and began to make its slow climb up to the first drop. As they got higher and higher Lisa became more and more nervous.

"And now the fun begins," said Harry. Then as an afterthought, he added, "Oh, I should have warned you that people have been known to get really sick on this ride and usually throw up afterwards."

"What?" shrieked Lisa just before the first drop began.

"KYAAAAA!"

"HAHAHA!"

XoX

"I hate you, Harry," Lisa grumbled, looking green after the ride finished.

Harry smiled at her teasingly. "We both know you can never hate me, you love me too much," he rubbed her back as they sat down on one of the benches. "So what do you want to do next?" he asked.

"Falcon's Flight."

"Alright," Harry stood up and held his hand out to Lisa, a large grin on his face. "Come on."

Lisa gave a million watt smile as she took his hand.

XoX

"So how did you like the amusement park you two?" asked Stacy as they were on their way home.

"It was amazing!" Lisa cheered in the back seat. "We went on all these cool rides and we went to the arcade, and we played some games, Harry won me this bear!" she held up a large purple stuffed bear.

"It was alright," Harry said, yawning a bit. He'd had a lot of fun with Lisa, but the rides weren't quite as good as flying in Quidditch was.

Lisa rolled her eyes, "way to be enthusiastic, Harry."

"Hey, I had fun," Harry said plaintively, shrugging a little. It was just that while roller coasters were fun they didn't give as much of a thrill as the things he had seen and done at school. Compared to playing Quidditch, practicing magic and fighting trolls, amusement parks just couldn't really compare.

"You don't sound like you had fun," Lisa grumbled a bit, poking him in the ribs.

Harry just grinned as he closed his eyes and leaned back to get some rest on the car ride home.

XoX

The rest of the week past and Harry had enjoyed his time playing with Lisa. The only thing of real interest that happened was when Hedwig had flown into his room with a parcel and a note. The note had said:

Your father left this to me when he died. Use it well.

in loopy handwriting. Inside the parcel had been a cloak that turned Harry invisible when he put it on, he had read about invisibility cloaks and how rare they were. He had wondered who had given it to him, since the letter had not come with a name and he had not told anyone where he was, but had eventually given up on finding out. The days had gone by and soon enough it was December thirty first and Harry was planning on going to the party at Blaise's house.

"Do you have to go?" Harry smiled as Lisa began complaining from her spot on the couch. They were currently watching one of the new cartoons Lisa had started to watch a lot since he had left for Hogwarts. The cartoon was about a duck called Drake Mallard who had a secret hero identity called Darkwing Duck and fought crime. He had only been paying a little attention to it, even when he was little his magic just made cartoons like this boring. Still, it was interesting.

"Well, I don't have to, but I did say I would," replied Harry, he was laying on his back as on the couch, his legs over the back of the couch. He flipped over to a right side position and looked at Lisa. "And you know my word is important to me."

"Whatever," she said with a pout. "You're going to miss our New Year celebration."

"I know," said Harry with an apologetic look, "I'm sorry, but it was either New Year's, or Christmas and I would rather spend Christmas with you."

Lisa smiled as she leaned over and gave him a big hug. "Fine, you can go, but you're going to be spending the rest of the time with me and my family. Got it?"

"Yes, ma'am!" said Harry, giving a mock salute. She gave his arm a swat as he flitted off the couch, "Do you need a ride?"

"Nah, I've ordered a taxi to come," he said. He looked at his watch, "speaking of, it should be here soon so I need to get ready. I'll see you later ok?"

"Fine, see you," she sniffed a bit. Harry sighed, she always got like this. A part of him wished he could take her, but she didn't know about magic, he hadn't even shown her his wandless magic when they were little. He remembered his mom ranting about how unfair it was that she wasn't able to show her parents all she had learned when she went to school. It was the only secret he had ever kept from her, simply because he knew that as someone who couldn't use magic, it would be safer for her if she didn't know.

"Come here," he said, opening his arms so he could wrap them around her when she barreled into him. "You know it's only going to be for a few hours, you don't need to get all sad and depressed. I'll be back before you know it."

"I know," Lisa said with a small sniff. "But since you're in a new school, I rarely ever get to see you. And since your here I want to spend you to spend time with me."

"Being a little selfish?" asked Harry, giving her a teasing grin.

Lisa stuck her tongue out at him.

"Don't worry, I'll be back before you know it," Harry said, letting go of her. He left a little while after that, making his way towards the park. There was no one there at the moment and Harry was able to simply apparate to a small side street in Daigon Alley. He had a stop to make before he could go to this party Blaise's mom had invited him to.

XoX

Harry was greeted as soon as he entered Madam Malkin's.

"Here for your dress robes?" asked Madam Malkin, "hold on just one second, I'll go get them for you."

"Thank you," said Harry as the woman went into the back of the store. He had come in a week ago and placed an order for dress robes. A few seconds later Madame Malkin came out with a small box.

"Here you are," she said, "charmed and ready to go. Since you've already paid cash in advance, you can just take them."

"Thanks, actually I needed to wear them now," said Harry. "Do you have a place I could change?"

"Of course, in the back there are several changing rooms," answered Madam Malkin. "You can use one of those."

"Thank you," said Harry, quickly making his way to the back. He found a small hall with several doors, each door had a number on the front going from one to twelve. He chose the closest one and entered before stripping off his jeans, shirt and jacket. Next he began to put on the robes, truthfully, he still couldn't decide whether or not he liked wearing robes. They looked interesting, and kind of reminded him of those pictures of Merlin that he had read in story books, but they were so hard to put on. Especially these dress robes, which had all these added clasps and straps that were completely unnecessary.

"How do you get this stupid thing on," Harry muttered angrily as he tried his best to put the robes on. It took several minutes trying to work which straps and clasps went together before he finally got it. When he finished he looked himself in the mirror. His robes were a dark forest green color that brought out the odd glow that his eyes had. "Not bad," he finally decided.

After stuffing his clothes in a bag he had brought with him and shrinking the bag, Harry walked out of the changing room and into the main entranceway. "Thanks again," Harry called out as he left. He made his way to the Leaky Cauldron, doing his best not to attract attention, ever since his first appearance Harry had done his best to never be spotted here, usually by wearing some kind of disguise.

Harry quickly walked over to the floo in the small pub, grabbed some floo powder and in a clear voice, called out, "Zabini Manor!"

It felt as though he was being sucked down a giant drain. He seemed to be spinning very fast – he saw several fire places traveling past him at a fast pace and it was only the grace given to him by his combat training that kept him from stumbling about. As he wondered when he would arrive at his destination he saw one of the many fire places getting closer and closer. In a second later he felt his body shoot out of the fire place and he was sent flying into the air. Acting quickly he flipped himself over and landed right on a couch before bouncing off. As he landed on his feet an amused voice spoke up behind him.

"Do you always make such an entrance when using the floo?"

Harry turned and scratched the back of his head with an embarrassed blush on his face. "Well, this is the first time I've ever used the floo," he replied to Blaise. "I just did it how you guys told me to, no one said I'd be shot out of the fireplace like a rocket."

"A what?" asked Blaise.

"Never mind," Harry sighed, despite knowing that Blaise and the other purebloods had no idea what he was talking about, it was still hard kicking the habit of using the muggle phrases he usually did. Focusing his attention elsewhere, he took a quick look around and let out a whistle, "this is a nice place you live in."

They looked to be in a large hall with roman columns lining the room and paintings set up on the walls. There was a large double-door with gold inlay patterns at the end, the whole place spoke of opulence and wealth.

"I guess," Blaise said as he started walking. "Anyways, you're just in time for the party, come on, Tracey's already here."

"What about Daphne?" asked Harry.

Blaise shook his head. "She hasn't come to one of our gatherings since her mum died."



"I see," Harry said softly. He followed Blaise into a small hall. "So how did you like your Christmas present?"

Blaise gave him a grin. "I have to admit it's a nice piece of work," he held up his hand to show an expensive rolex watch. "I've never seen a watch quite like this, and the charms are impressive." He pressed a button on the side and the time appeared in light green coloring over it.

"That's because the watch is actually a muggle watch," said Harry. "It's one of the few that doesn't run on batteries but on solar energy."

"Solar energy?"

"The sun," said Harry, "that little black spot at the top is a solar array that allows it to get power from the sun." He had been very lucky to find it, the technology was new and seemed capable of working around magic. He still didn't know how, and the technology was fairly new so only a few items actually used solar energy.

"Huh," Blaise looked at the watch. "That's actually pretty fascinating; I didn't know the sun could be used for an energy source." They stopped outside of another set of double-doors and Blaise opened it, "Here we are."

He led the way into a large room that was beautifully decorated with posh renaissance styled decorations, banners with the image of a Dawita in a light silver, which are fairies, nymphs, goddesses or enchanted persons who are believed to guard natural creations such as forests, seas, mountains, land and air. There were also banners with the Slytherin symbol in green. Several tables lay on the left with many varied kinds of food and a bowl of punch, or maybe wine, given the kind of party this was supposed to be. A light music was playing in the background and the center of the room was set up as a dance floor, a few of the older people at the party were already dancing.

"Harry!"

"Tracey OOF –" Harry grunted as Tracey jumped on top of him, moving back a step as he tried to keep his balance and grabbed onto her to keep her from falling. "Trace, get off," Harry said.

Tracey grinned as she unwrapped herself from him and stepped back. "Did you miss me?" she asked.

Harry looked at her in thought for a second before shrugging. "No, not really," he said.

"What! Why you –" she growled menacingly but noticed the smile on his face. "Ha ha, very funny," she mumbled, "and I thought I was supposed to be the sneaky one."

"So how'd you like your present?" asked Harry.

"Oh, I love it!" Tracey pointed to her neck where a small green choker with a set of silver snakes in the eternity symbol with a diamond in their mouths were. "It's an amazing gift, it must have been expensive," she commented.

"I guess," Harry said with a shrug. They were pretty pricy for most people, but Harry could spend that much his entire life, every day, and still be richer than most people. "I'm glad you liked it," he looked around at all the people who were at the gathering, "so is there anyone else we know here?"

"No," Blaise said, "at least, no one you know. Most of these people are friends of my mother, she's very popular within pureblood society."

"Yeah, cuz she's rich," Tracey said.

Blaise gave Tracey a cool glare before walking towards a crowd where Harry could just make out the face of his mother. "Come on, Harry," he called out, "mum will be happy to see you."

Harry followed Blaise as he led him to the small group, the crowd of people seemed to part as they noticed Blaise, and the whispers began when they saw Harry.

"That scar..."

"Is that Harry Potter?"

"I didn't know the Zabinis knew him."

Harry almost rolled his eyes, these people sounded like a bunch of school children.

"Mother," Blaise said, getting the Italian beauties attention, "Harry's here."

A smile seemed to light Celestina's face, "Harry, I'm glad you could make it." She offered him her hand and Harry took it and lightly kissed the back, several thoughts ran through his mind about how to proceed, information he had read on pureblood etiquette and the proper responses coming to the forefront of his mind.

"Lady Zabini," he said with a smile. "It is good to see you again, you look very beautiful tonight, your dress compliments your eyes and skin tone very well. And thank you for the invite."

"Celeste, Harry, remember," she said with a smile. "And thank you, it is nice to see a young man who knows a thing or two about fashion."

"It's good you've managed to make it," Celestina continued, gently pulling a girl who looked like a seventeen or eighteen year old carbon copy of her forward. "This is my daughter, Christine, Christine, this is Harry Potter."

"So Blaise was telling the truth after all," Christine said, eyeing Harry up and down in a way that made him nervous, it reminded him something of a wolf once it had found its prey. "You know, you're pretty cute, I could almost eat, you, up."

"...uh, thank you?" asked Harry uncertainly.

Christine laughed, "oh don't worry, I don't bite or anything."

"Oh," Harry said dumbly, more for a need to say something than having anything of substance to say.

"Do you know how to dance?" asked Christine suddenly.

"Um....what?"

"You know, dance?"

Harry scratched his nose a bit, "well, not really, I've never actually danced before." He absently wondered if Capoeira could be considered a dance?

"Well then, why don't I teach you," she said, grabbing him by the arms and leading him to the dance floor.

"Hey, what?" he asked as he was suddenly yanked by the pretty girl.

"You're pretty tall for your age," she said, ignoring his slightly confused talking as they stopped once they reached the center of the dance floor. "I had thought Blaise would be the tallest one there, he gets his grandfather's height."

"Comes with my lifestyle," Harry said absently, trying to get his rhythm back, he wasn't quite sure what to do in this situation. "Are you sure you want to teach me to dance? I might step on your feet."

"I'll trust you. Now, put your left hand here, and your right hand here," she grabbed his hands in her own, placing the left on her waist and the right one in her own. She moved a little closer to him and Harry realized she was rather short, Harry was around five feet on the dot, having grown a bit during the school year, Christine was around five foot four, making her less than a head taller than him.

"And now, just follow my lead," Harry concentrated on what he and Christine were doing, focusing first on not stepping on her feet, then on the way she was moving. There were a few instances where he stumbled, however, combat was a lot like dancing, at least, it ensured that he had enough grace not to look stupid. Once Harry felt like he had seen enough he began to subtly change their positions until he was leading her around.

"I thought you said you've never danced before?" Christine commented in a way that made it sound like a question. "You seem to be pretty good to me."

"I haven't, not with a partner," he said. "However, I do practice hand-to-hand combat, which requires a fluid mixture of speed, grace and power, all of which are required in a dance."

"That's muggle fighting isn't it?" asked Christine.

"Yes, I use it as a form of exercise and to make sure that should I run into a situation where my magic can't help me, I have another form of defense to fall back on," Harry answered.

"Well, that's impressive to say the least," she commented. "I hear you're quite talented in school, too."

"I guess," said Harry, having to focus more on dancing than talking as Christine seemed to shift gears and dance in increasingly more complicated maneuvers. "I just do my best in everything I'm given."

"A modest answer," Christine replied with a grin as she leaned in close. Harry gulped as the girl stuck out her chest, giving him a preview down the front of her dress. He heard her whisper, "I do so love men who keep themselves...grounded."

XoX

A little ways away Tracey was gritting her teeth as she watched Harry dance with Christine. "Who does your sister think she is, some kind of cradle robber!" she growled.

"Are you jealous?" asked Blaise, "you shouldn't be, she always does this no matter who it is."

"But she's like, nine years older than him!" Tracey exclaimed.

"As I said, it's just how she is," Blaise gave a small shrug. "It's how mum taught her to behave."

"Yeah, well, I'm going to go dance," Tracey marched over to where Harry and Christine were still dancing and tapped the young woman on the shoulder. "Excuse me, mind if I steal your dance partner?"

Christine looked at her and blinked several times. "Hmmm," she tapped her chin, "I guess not..." she looked a little reluctant, thinking of maybe flirting with Harry some more to get on Tracey's nerves, but in the end decided not to. "But you," she pointed at Harry, "owe me a few dances."

"I do?" asked Harry, "well, ok, I guess."

"Good," Christine said, nodding her head in a satisfied manner. "It was nice dancing with you."

"You to Christine," Harry said, "you're a pretty good teacher."

"Call me Christy," she said with a grin and a flirtatious wink.

"Ok, that's enough," Tracey grabbed onto Harry. "Come on, time to dance."

"Uh, sure," said Harry in a somewhat confused manner.

"Ugh, can you believe her?" asked Tracey as they started to dance. "I swear that girl's a total cradle robber, the way she was all over you."

Harry frowned as he led Tracey around the dance floor. "You think so? Well, I did get this feeling that she was going to eat me whenever she gave me this look." He brought his and Tracey's entwined hands over her head and spun her around before resuming their normal position.

"That's because of Blaise's mum," Tracey grumbled. "She's really nice and all, but a lot of people wonder about how she got so much money. Did you know she's gone through seven husbands? All of them mysteriously died and she inherited their fortune."

"You think she killed them?" asked Harry, looking over at Celestina. "You know, she does seem rather um...popular with men, but I can't see her as someone who would actually kill others just to get rich."

"Oh, I don't think she killed them," said Tracey, and paused as she tried to put her thoughts into words. "The men she actually married were all extremely old, some were pretty much on their last few years of life."

"So...she married old men, so that when they died she'd inherit their fortune?"

"Something like that," Tracey said. "I heard that her first husband wasn't like that, but that he had been killed during one of his business trips. After that she only married men who were already going to die soon anyways."

"I see," he paused, "and how does that relate to the hungry wolf stare and cradle robbing that Christine was doing?"

"Christine was raised by Lady Zabini, and she's probably been taught to go after rich wizards," said Tracey. "You're going to be rich when you come into your magical inheritance at seventeen, hell, if the gift you gave me is any indication you're already rich. She's likely trying to get her foot in the door, so to speak, so that she can marry you when you reach that age."

"That's kind of creepy, to be honest," Harry said before sighing. "Great, those books I got on etiquette and politics in the wizarding world didn't cover stuff like that. Of course, it does happen in the muggle world too, it happened once to a French Baron in the late eighteen hundreds, though it doesn't anymore."

"Are you some kind of history buff or something?" asked Tracey with an amused grin.

"Not really, I just like to read a lot," Harry looked up at the ceiling in thought as they went through one of the more complicated dance steps. "I've read books on all kinds of things, history, math, literature, science, fantasy, adventure..."

"So basically you read a lot," she said plainly. "But then, how come I rarely ever see you reading? I mean, you spend so much time helping all of us with our homework, I rarely ever even see you study and you've only picked up books when you're alone in the library."

He grinned at her. "Sorry, that's a trade secret."

"And there's no way I can get that secret out of you?" asked Tracey.

"Nope, my lips are sealed."

"Fine, I accept your challenge."

Harry gaped at her, "What challenge?"

"The one to learn your secret of course," she said like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Who ever said that was a challenge?"

"I did."

"But I never issued a challenge!"

"Too bad. I'm going to learn your secrets, no matter how long it takes."

Harry sighed as he realized he may have given away a bit more information than he had wanted. While he doubted anyone would figure out his secret, he didn't want to take the chance of someone finding out. He promised himself he would be more careful in what he said in the future.

The rest of the night was spent with either hanging out with Blaise, dancing with Tracey, Christine and even Celestina had danced with him twice. By the end of the night his feet were killing him, but it was at least good practice, both with dancing and in learning a little more about social mores in the wizarding world. Over all he thought he did alright, and hoped that the few people he had been introduced to left with a good impression of him.

When he got back to Lisa's home his friend was already asleep, so he quietly went into his room and put his robes in his trunk before going to bed. He only had one more week of his holidays and so he wanted to make his time with his best friend as fun as possible.

XoX

So I'm not sure how much I liked this chapter. I wanted to introduce him to the more of the Wizarding world outside of Hogwarts. Anyways, let me know what you think.



## Chapter 11: Start of the Second Semester

XoX

Harry Potter found an empty compartment in the middle of the Hogwarts Express, opened the door, moved in and reached into his robe. After pulling out his trunk and enlarging it to its original size he flicked out his wand and levitated it into the alcove above. With a small sigh he sat down and leaned against the wall so he could stare out the window. A few minutes later he heard the door open and a voice speak up.

"Harry."

"Hey Daph," Harry said, turning his head and giving the blond girl a smile. "How was your Yule Holiday?"

"It was ok," Daphne said softly, walking in and setting her trunk on the floor. Before she could try and put it in the alcove Harry levitated it and set it in for her. "Thanks," she said as she sat down next to him.

"You're welcome," he said.

"And thanks for the gift," Daphne's hand went up to her chest, where the necklace he had gotten her was dangling. There was a small red tint staining her cheeks.

"No need to thank me," said Harry, tilting his head a little as he smiled at the blond girl. "You're my friend, and I wanted to get you something, so I did." Truthfully it had felt kind of nice spending all of that money. Ever since he had learned the value of money, Harry had been very stingy on what he bought. While he had splurged on a few items, like his watch, or the contacts he was wearing, he still had always been careful. That he now had more money than he could possibly spend in his lifetime was nice, and while he doubted he would waste as much money as he had during Christmas often, he did feel that the money he had bought his friends presents with was well-spent.

"Still... I feel kind of bad," Daphne said. A nervous expression crossed her face as she reached into her robe. She pulled out a small package and handed it to Harry. The raven haired youth took it,

blinking a few times before he looked over at his blond friend. "I-it's just something I got for you," she stuttered a bit, her face heating up and giving her cheeks a red tint. "I didn't know what you wanted so..."

Harry blinked a few more times, surprise evident on his face. Tracey and Blaise had given him gifts of course, when they saw him at the party. A broom cleaning kit and a wand servicing kit respectively. But he had not really expected Daphne to get him anything. "Thank you," he said softly, opening the package.

What he got was a small note book, bound in leather and looking much like every other book in the wizarding world. It was green in color and Harry noted that it had Runes on the spine. He opened it up and saw the pages were blank.

"It's a journal," Daphne said, getting him to look at her. "It's charmed with an impervious charm, so that it doesn't break down from age, and an ever-lasting-pages charm. You can write thousands of years worth of information in there and it will never run out of pages."

Harry took a moment to set the book on his lap. He looked up at Daphne and smiled before surprising the girl with a hug. "Thanks Daph," he breathed.

"You're welcome," she said, feeling very pleased that no one else was in the compartment right now, lest they see the megaton blush on her cheeks. She pulled back a second later and did her best to banish the redness on her face. Feeling a change of topic was in order, she asked, "So how was your Christmas?"

"It was nice," Harry replied. "It's been a while since I had seen my friend so it was good to see her again." As the two began to talk, he related some of what he did over the holidays to Daphne. She was suitably interested when he spoke of the muggle theme park and described all of the rides to her.

"That actually sounds surprisingly fun," Daphne said.

Harry gave her a teasing grin, "You sound so surprised. Did you think muggles don't know how to have fun?" He chuckled a bit at Daphne's blush.

The compartment door opened again and Hermione walked in with Neville. "Hello, Harry, Daphne," Hermione greeted excitedly as she sat down on the seat opposite from them. "I can't thank you enough for my Christmas gift, it was so informative and amazing, did you know that the theory behind many of the spells we use are based on basic Arithmantic numbers that were used to create wand movements? I found the entire book to absolutely fascinating."

"That's nice, Hermione, and yes I did know how wand movements came to be about," Harry said bemusedly. He turned to Neville, "Hey Neville, how was your Yule Holiday?"

"It was good," he said, "I wanted to thank you for the seedlings you gave me. I planted them as soon as I could and Gran's having one of our House elves taking care of them for me."

"What's a house elf?" asked Hermione.

"It's like a butler," said Harry before Neville could mention anything, he knew Hermione, with her muggle ideals would not approve of what was essentially slavery, and had no desire to listen to her begin preaching about House elf rights, even if he didn't approve of slavery. He sent both Neville and Daphne a look that they managed to interpret as 'keep silent' and didn't say anything to contradict him.

"Oh," Hermione said, "anyways, I couldn't send this to you since you never told me where you lived, but I got a present for you."

As Hermione began through a muggle backpack she had brought, Neville added his own, "I did too," and began searching his robes.

He ended up getting an old book on defensive magic from Neville. It was fairly old, and some of the spells were outdated, but Harry felt it would be useful to look up some of the spells and see how they compared with today's spells. "I wasn't sure what to get you but I saw you reading a book on defensive spells," the boy admitted.

Hermione's gift had surprisingly not been a book or any form of learning implement like he would have assumed. Instead she had bought a neat looking shark-tooth necklace, which he put around his neck, right next to his yin-yang necklace.

Harry had thanked them both for the gifts, having not actually expected them. The two friends had merely waved his thanks off, saying it was the least they could do.

As the hour before the Hogwarts express passed more and more of their friends came in, Blaise and Tracey sat on the side with Daphne and Harry. Tracey grumbled when she saw Daphne was already next to Harry, "How come you get to sit next to Harry again?"

Daphne looked at Tracey with a smirk and shrugged, "Perhaps you should have come earlier," she replied. Tracey stuck her tongue out at her blond friend before a grin came to her face.

"You know, seeing you sit with him twice now, when you wouldn't even look at him before is kind of startling," she said teasingly. "Could it be that our Daphne is gaining a crush on Harry?" said boy raised an eyebrow at the brunette girl's teasing while their blond friend blushed bright red and sputtered.

"Don't be ridiculous," she huffed, trying desperately to gain control of her facial color. "I've just... realized, that Harry is a very kind and dependable person." Daphne glared at the grinning brunette, "he's my friend."

"Sure, sure, tell yourself that if it helps you sleep at night," Tracey said airily.

Susan and Hannah came in next and Hannah had a similar reaction that Tracey had, complaining about Daphne getting to sit next to Harry twice. Harry himself couldn't really understand why they were complaining about getting to sit next to him, it wasn't as if sitting next to him was anything really special. He figured it was just one of those girl things that he wouldn't understand until he was older.

Harry ended up needing to expand the cabin to fit them all in after that, and a few minutes after Susan and Hannah entered, Padma came in. Several minutes after she had entered, the compartment was expanded again as Lisa and Terry entered, surprising the pair since they had not been seen on the ride home.

"Wotcher, Lisa, Terry," Harry said, "did you have a good Yule?"

"It was alright," Terry said, sitting down next to Hermione where he began to talk to her about charms.

"I had a good Christmas," Lisa said, she blushed a bit as she looked at Harry. "And thank you for the ankle bracelet." She held up her left leg to show the gold bracelet with several silver ravens with amethyst eyes on them that were charmed to flap their wings. "It's very beautiful."

"You're welcome," Harry replied, smiling a bit, "and how did your sister take it?"

Lisa's grin was infectious, "She was jealous. That alone was worth more than all the galleons in the world."

With the arrival of those three, Harry also ended up getting more gifts. Padma had reciprocated his gesture in a reverse fashion, instead of buying him muggle poetry she had bought him wizard poetry. Susan and Hannah had pooled their money together and gotten him a rather expensive looking wand-holster. Apparently, it was of the same grade as the ones aurors used. Terry had gotten him a book on Transfiguration, and Lisa had bought him several products from a joke shop called Zonko's.

Conversation was enthusiastic after that as everyone compared stories of their Christmas, or Yuletide as it was called in the wizarding world. Everyone who hadn't already thanked Harry profusely for their gifts, Padma asked if he would be willing to get her some more poetry books from the muggle world and Lisa, Tracey, Susan and Hannah were comparing jewelry. Daphne might have too, but she had fallen asleep like last time, her head resting on his shoulder. How she could sleep when it was so noisy like this was beyond him.

"So Harry, what are you going to do when we get back to Hogwarts?" asked Blaise suddenly, bringing Harry's attention to the Italian boy.

Harry blinked. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Don't give me that," Blaise said. "Within half a year you've managed to turn Hogwarts on its head with your complete disregard for the

houses and your creation of the common room. I for one don't believe that you've finished causing upheaval."

"I hadn't realized what I done was so unusual," said Harry, shifting a little bit as Daphne unconsciously pulled herself closer to him. He smiled at the sleeping girl. Lisa had been more or less using him as a pillow for years, so he had pretty much grown used to receiving physical affection from the opposite gender. He worked his arm a bit as it had fallen asleep and placed it around her shoulder. He took note of the few scowls Daphne received, but couldn't for the life of him figure out why they were scowling.

He then focused his attention on Blaise, "I don't really have any more plans, I got some games and books for the common room that I think others would be interested in, for the most part I just plan on finishing school and doing the best I can." It would probably be more accurate to say he had no more plans for change this year. With his Animagus project, his sparring with Tonks, Quidditch, the Philosopher's Stone, and the Finals that would be coming at the end of the year he felt he had more than enough on his plate at the moment.

"That sounds kind of boring compared to all the excitement you've caused," said Hannah. "I was kind of hoping you'd have something else that would be entertaining."

"Sorry," Harry said apologetically, though from the sound of his voice it was hard to tell whether he was saying that because he was actually sorry or not. He might have said more but the compartment door opened and Ron Weasley was standing there with a look of fury on his red face.

"Can we help you?" asked Harry, he was rather curious to know why Ron had come into their compartment; everyone knew Ron was not friends with any of them.

"Why are you still hanging out with these snakes?" he asked in a demanding tone. "Don't you know all Slytherins are evil! They're just using you for their own purpose, they'd likely to sell you to You-Know-Who if he was still alive."

All of the Slytherins in the compartment bristled at the insult. None of their families had even been involved in the war with Voldemort,

neither siding with him or against him, and they did not appreciate being compared to the standard Death Eater children who were in their house.

Harry merely raised an eyebrow, Ron had been doing his best to ignore them once it became clear none of the boy's threats were bothering him. He wondered if something had changed over the holidays to cause this new irritation in the boy.

He shrugged the thought off a second later, he didn't particularly care either way.

"I suggest you leave Weasel," Blaise said coldly. "I can't stand people like you, fools who don't know anything about us and automatically assume that because we're in Slytherin we're Death Eaters."

"You are! All Slytherins are evil!" Ron growled at him. "It's a basic fact that everyone knows. And you!" he pointed at Harry, Hermione and Neville. "You traitors keep hanging out with them!"

"Weasley, shut up," said Harry, flicking out his wand and waving it at Ron. "Silencio."

Ron opened his mouth to scream some more but no words came out, another flick of Harry's wand and Ron was pushed out of the door and the sound of locking could be heard.

"Maybe now we can get some peace," Daphne muttered, having woken up some time during Ron's ranting.

"You said it Daph," Tracey agreed.

The rest of the train ride was uneventful. Malfoy tried to get in as well, but the locking charm kept him out and the silencing charm Harry had set up around the room ensured that they couldn't hear him when he tried to speak. It was around dinner time that the Hogwarts Express stopped at the Hogsmeade station, and they all walked out of the compartment and made their way outside.

Harry and the others had to split up as they were directed to several carriages, Daphne, Tracey, Blaise and Neville went in one, while

Harry went to one with Hannah, Susan and Hermione and Padma got into another with Lisa and Terry.

As everyone else got into the carriage Harry stopped and the looked at the winged horses that were pulling it. They had a skeletal body, face with reptilian features, and leathery wide wings that resembled a bat. Harry saw the one closest to him staring at him, at least it looked like it was staring at him. He reached out to pet one when Hannah's voice came to him.

"Harry, what are you doing?" she asked from her spot in the carriage.

Harry looked from the horse to Hannah, she was looking at him oddly, as if she couldn't see the horse. "Nothing," he said, making his way towards the carriage and climbing on.

"I saved you a seat," Hannah said, patting the spot right next to her.

"Thanks," said Harry as he sat down and the carriage ride began. Harry didn't pay any attention to his surroundings, instead opting to close his eyes and lean back in his seat. Conversation was sparse as the others looked around at the surrounding forest in interest. Dinner was the same as usual, Harry's three Slytherin friends sat at their house, where they proceeded to ignore Malfoy as he ranted about house propriety and how they shouldn't hang out with Gryffindors and mudbloods. The others also sat with their house for today as well, since it was the start of the next semester.

When dinner ended all of the students made their way to their respective houses. Harry said good night to Hermione and headed up to the first year dormitories with the other guys. He, Neville, Dean and Seamus all shared stories of their Christmas. Seamus talked about how his mum let him drink some rum, Dean spoke of the many soccer games he played with his friends and what he called surfing the web. They spoke for an hour before heading for bed, none of them noticed the glare that Ron Weasley had on his face from where he sat.

XoX

The term started up again and classes went on as usual. Harry did the same as always, even though Snape seemed to have gotten back into form from his grudging respect of Harry and had taken to



insulting the raven haired first year every chance he got. Surprisingly enough, he didn't take points.

Harry had managed to fill the common room with nearly every muggle board and card game known to man. During his free time, or when he wasn't training, Harry was teaching purebloods how to play games like Mouse Trap, Monopoly and Life. He had even gone a step further and managed to get Hermione to help him research how wizard chess sets were charmed. The two had then charmed all of the board games to work like wizard chess. Now not only did the pieces move when you told them to, but they also insulted you when doing so.

The only other thing of interest was the training sessions Harry was undertaking with Tonks every day he didn't have Quidditch practice.

"Expelliarmus!"

A red bolt of light shot from Harry's wand and raced towards Tonks, only to hit the wall and dissipate as Tonks dodged it. She returned fire with a stunner that Harry was quick to twist away from.

"Stupefy!"

Harry return stunner sailed towards Tonks but she dodged, how Harry had planned for her to and accurately predicted which way she would dodge. His next spell was the "incarcerous" which conjured a set of robes and shot them at Tonks, forcing her to bring up a shield. After that the Metamorph decided it was time to up her game.

She sent a flurry of spells that Harry had a difficult time dodging. He did his best, of course, but even with his style which in many ways centered around dodging and then countering, he still couldn't dodge them all.

"Protego!"

He was eventually forced to bring up a shield and hope to withstand the bombardment. Of course that was what Tonks had been hoping for and she timed her next attack, a stunner, to hit him as soon as he dropped his shield.

A few seconds later Harry was woken up by an enervate spell to see Tonks grinning over him.

"I lost again," Harry groaned. He had never liked losing at anything, his competitive nature often pushed him into working hard at anything someone else was better at than him, whether it was academics, sports or something else entirely. He still lost in certain things on occasion, particularly when he sparred against his Shi. But losing to someone like Master Wei, who had a lifetime of experience in combat and losing to someone closer to his own age were too different things, in his mind at least.

"At least you're improving," Tonks said as Harry sat up. "Though you should learn to non-verbalize your spells; also, you tend to point where you want to shoot long before you actually fire off a spell."

"I can non-verbalize my spells," Harry said with a grunt as he flicked his wand and launched a silent stupefy at a wall. "The problem is I can't split my mind between spell casting, dodging, defending, predicting your movement and observing my surroundings at the same time." It was a work in progress, for though he could multi-task to the extreme, the kind he was trying to achieve was difficult even for his organised and photographic retentive mind.

Tonks looked at him stupidly for almost a full minute, making Harry slightly uncomfortable before speaking, "do you really try and pay attention to all of that when we spar?"

"Of course," said Harry with a small frown. "My Sifu always taught me to be wary of my opponents and surroundings so that I can use the terrain to my advantage and predict what moves my opponent will make before they make it, that way, I can counter attack." He shook his head, By adding spell casting I have to add in wand movements, visualizing the spell and the incantation so that's splitting my attention three ways, adding the other four that a seven way split."

Tonks whistled before grinning as she rubbed the back of her neck, looking a little sheepish. "Wow, I don't think I've ever focused on so much. I normally just focus on my opponent, my spell casting and my dodging."

"Yeah well, I'm hoping it becomes instinctual for me," said Harry. "So, you up for another round?"

Tonks grinned, "So long as you're up for losing again."

XoX

Aside from getting his ass kicked by Tonks, Harry also worked with his team in Quidditch practice. Though Wood was working the team harder than ever, even the endless rain that had replaced the snow couldn't dampen his spirits. The Weasleys complained that Wood was becoming a fanatic, but Harry was on Wood's side. If they won their next match, against Hufflepuff, they would overtake Slytherin in the house championship for the first time in seven years. While Harry didn't care about the Gryffindor/Slytherin rivalry, something that was obvious to everyone since he hung out with three Slytherins, he did want to win.

It had been during one particular practice, when it had been wet and muddy and raining, that Wood had given them some bad news. He'd just gotten very angry with the Weasleys, who kept dive-bombing each other and pretending to fall off their brooms.

"Will you stop messing around!" he yelled. "That's exactly the sort of thing that'll lose us the match! Snape's refereeing this time, and he'll be looking for any excuse to knock points off Gryffindor!" George Weasley really did fall off his broom at these words.

"Snape's refereeing." he spluttered through a mouthful of mud. "When has he ever refereed a Quidditch match? He's not going to be fair if we might overtake Slytherin." The rest of the team landed next to George to complain, too.

"It's not my fault," said Wood. "We've just got to make sure we play a clean game, so Snape hasn't got an excuse to pick on us."

After practice Harry had made his way towards the All House Common Room and sat down on one of the comfy chairs, deep in thought. A part of him wondered why Snape, a man who he knew didn't know a thing about Quidditch and never played, would be the referee. Another part also wondered if it had something to do with how his broom was jinxed, was he there to ensure it didn't happen again. Had he been the one who jinxed it, and somehow managed

to convince the headmaster that he was the best man to protect him? Unlike Hermione he was not one hundred percent sure that Snape had jinxed his broom, but by that same token he was not sure the man hadn't either. Unfortunately, he had no way to investigate into the matter, not in time for the match anyways.

"Hey, Harry," Harry looked up at the sound of the voice and saw Padma sit down next to him with a chess set. "You look rather bored, up for a game?"

Harry shrugged and turned towards her, "Sure, why not?" He made liberal use of the levitation charm to float the chess board between them, once he had the charm placed he reached out with his magic to keep it afloat and put his wand away. Padma just looked at him and the floating chess board for a moment before shaking her head. She really didn't think she would ever get used to the casual way he used magic.

"So how have your classes been?" asked Padma as they set up their respective pieces, Harry was black while she was white. The only classes Gryffindor shared with Ravenclaw was Charms and Astronomy, which was shared by everyone, so he only really saw Padma during meals.

"Not bad," Harry watched as Padma made the first move and moved his own accordingly. "Pawn to B5. They're a little boring but I don't think there's anything that can be done about that."

Padma rolled her eyes as she studied the board. "Only you could possibly think classes are boring," she commented idly, "Knight to E6."

Harry watched as the knight moved itself across the board and stopped right in front of one of his pawns. "I just don't think we're moving fast enough," he said, "Rook to G3. I know it's because a lot of people seem to have trouble with the spells we learn and what not, but I really wish our teachers would speed up their lessons."

Padma giggled a bit. "As I said, Harry, only you," she looked at the board and said, "Queen to C7." Harry watched as Padma's queen moved stopped in front of one of his knights and jabbed it with her spear, then took the knight's place on the square. They played several games and Harry won each one, though Padma was pretty

good; if he hadn't read several books on chess and strategy and played the game quite a bit with Lisa's dad, he would have never noticed some of the set-ups she had tried until it was too late. As it was, he was often capable of seeing through her plan several moves in advance.

"Check mate," Harry said for the fourth time in a row.

Padma sighed, "how are you so good?"

"I've read up on chess strategy," Harry said. "It's the same game in the muggle world as it is in the Wizarding World."

"You read some weird things, Harry," she replied as she stood up. "I had fun, but I really should get back to work."

"Right," Harry said, "maybe the next time we play I'll give you some tips."

"That would be nice," she smiled at him before leaving.

"Harry!" Hermione greeted excitedly as she sat down on the spot Padma had just vacated. Harry looked at her and spotted the large book she sat on her lap.

"Reading some more Hogwart's, a History?" he asked bemusedly. He had finished more than half of the book already but it was only slightly interesting to him so he figured a slow read would be better.

"Yes, but not for the reasons you think," Hermione said as she flipped the book open and began shuffling through several pages. "I finally found out what's hidden under the trap door!"

Harry frowned, "Hermione, I thought I told you that this would be best left alone." Inwardly, he was cursing himself; he had known that Hermione was very curious about everything around her. It should have been obvious that she would not have given up her search just because he said to.

"I know, Harry, but look," she set the book in his lap and pointed at the page, "read here."

Harry sighed as he looked at the book and read:

The ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Philosopher's Stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal.

There have been many reports of the Philosopher's Stone over the centuries, but the only Stone currently in existence belongs to Mr. Nicolas Flamel, the noted alchemist and opera lover. Mr. Flamel, who celebrated his six hundred and sixty-fifth birthday last year, enjoys a quiet life in Devon with his wife, Perenelle (six hundred and fifty-eight).

He knew all of this of course, he had read it before. "Hermione," he looked at her, "I know you're naturally curious and everything, but please, don't go poking your nose in something like this."

"But –" Hermione tried to protest but Harry cut her off.

"Look, there's obviously a reason that Professor Dumbledore has it here," Harry said slowly. What that reason was, he couldn't fathom, however the last thing he wanted was one of his friends getting killed by poking their nose into something like this. "And it's likely that the teachers know about it too, that dog is likely only one of the protections around it."

"But what if Snape is trying to steal it?" asked Hermione in a fierce whisper as she leaned in.

"What makes you think he is?" Harry asked with a small frown.

"Remember what Tracey told us," Hermione said, "she said that he was limping and bleeding, what if he had used the Troll as a distraction and then gone to try and steal the Stone, but wasn't expecting the Cerberus? That would explain the injury, and then there's how he jinxed your broom."

"I'm still not convinced he jinxed my broom," said Harry. Hermione opened her mouth to defend her argument, but he didn't let her. "We have no proof one way or the other, yes, he could have been the one to jinx my broom, but at the same time he might not have been. And even if that's all true, even if he is after the stone, what are you

going to do about it? He's a fully trained wizard and you're a first year student, there is nothing you can do against him."

"I'll tell Dumbledore," Hermione said stubbornly.

"What makes you think Dumbledore doesn't already know?" asked Harry. Hermione faltered at that and he decided to press his point. "If you can figure it out, then I'm sure Dumbledore has known for a long time."

"Then why hasn't he done anything?" asked Hermione. "Why hasn't Professor Snape been sacked?"

"So Dumbledore can keep an eye on him, obviously," said Harry. "Haven't you heard the old saying, 'keep your friends close, and your enemies closer'? It's probably what Dumbledore is doing."

"Well –" Hermione stalled for a second before sighing, "alright, I see your point."

"Good," Harry said, standing up. "Now, why don't we go head to the Gryffindor common room, I'm going to need some rest for the Quidditch game tomorrow."

As they got to the Gryffindor common room both were surprised to see Neville lying on his back just outside the entrance. Hermione gasped as she rushed over, "What happened, Neville?"

"Malfoy," Neville said with gritted teeth. "I ran into him outside the library. He said he'd been looking for someone to practice on and hit me with a leg-locker jinx."

"Go to Professor McGonagall!" Hermione urged Neville while Harry performed the counter-curse and helped him up. "Report him!" Neville shook his head.

"I don't want more trouble," he mumbled.

Hermione looked about ready to argue but Harry saw and interrupted. "Hermione, why don't you get into the common room while I talk to Nev?" he suggested. Hermione looked torn for a second before nodding in agreement and heading through the portrait.

"I'm beginning to think Malfoy's getting a tad too big for his birches," Harry said. "I'm going to teach him a lesson sometime after the Quidditch match, do you want to help me and get some revenge?"

"I don't know," Neville mumbled, looking both eager and uncertain. "What if we get caught?"

"Oh I'm sure I'll get caught," Harry responded. "In fact, I'm counting on it, I need to set an example of what will happen to people who insult and curse my friends. But if you want, I'll make sure you don't get caught."

"Can I have a few days to think about it?" asked Neville.

"Of course," said Harry, "sit on it for a week or two and tell me if you want to then, k?"

At Neville's nod they both went into the common room and went over to where they saw Hermione sitting, and they both reassured her that if it happened again Neville would go to Professor McGonagall. She didn't seem convinced at first, wondering if they were just pulling her leg, but in the end dropped the debate as they began to talk on more lighthearted issues.

XoX

The next day classes went on as usual, during Defense Harry found himself thinking on the Quidditch game while he copied down ways to treat werewolf bites. He knew that with Snape refereeing he would need to be extra careful on the pitch, Snape had been getting more vindictive as of late and Harry had no clue why. Harry wondered if maybe the threat of telling McGonagall that Snape was using legilimency on a student had worn off, or if there was something else going on.

Of course, thinking of Snape also made Harry think of the Philosopher's Stone. Someone was after it, but was it Snape? And if it was, what then? Did Dumbledore know, or at least suspect Snape, and if so what would he do? And then what if it wasn't Snape going after the stone? There were simply too many unanswered questions, and Harry was finding out more and more just how much he hated not knowing.



He absently felt a small prickle in his scar and slammed his Occlumency barriers around it shut. Ever since he had been told by the sorting hat about his mental shields and their wizard name, Harry had been looking up any information on the subject he could. He also spent even more time practicing occlumency, tightening and securing his mental barriers even further against intrusion. If his mind were a vault, he was sure the goblins would be pleased by how secure it now was.

Lifting his head up the raven haired youth looked around but didn't see anybody who could have pulled it off, as the only adult wizard was Quirrell and he was currently stuttering out his lecture.

As class ended, Harry left and eventually wound up making his way to the Quidditch pitch with Neville and Hermione. Before he could head inside the locker room Hermione grabbed him.

"Something wrong, Hermione?" asked Harry.

"Harry, be careful," she said, her eyes looking at him pleadingly.

Harry rolled his eyes, and gently took her hand off his arm. "I'll be fine," he promised.

It wasn't long before he entered the locker room, where the rest of the team was already waiting. He listened to Wood's pep talk with half an ear, it was much the same spiel as the speech from his first game except with the added 'Snape will try and give us penalties so make sure you play a clean game' element to it. Harry just began putting on his Quidditch robes, fastening the straps and then picked up his Nimbus 2000.

XoX

Meanwhile, Hermione and Neville had found a pair of seats being saved for them by Susan and Hannah. The two Hufflepuffs looked over at the Gryffindors, Neville looked nervous while Hermione looked grim.

"Hermione, you look like someone killed your cat," Hannah said, "what's up?"

"She thinks Snape may try to kill Harry," Neville said.

"Really?" gasped Susan, looking shocked, worried and afraid all at the same time. "Why do you think Professor Snape's going to kill Harry."

"He jinxed his broom last time, and this time he's actually going to be refereeing," Hermione said with a grim frown. "Neville, you remember the incantation to the leg-locker jinx?"

"Locomotor Mortis," Neville said, placing a hand on his wand.

"Good."

The two Hufflepuffs looked at each other nervously before nodding and discreetly taking out their wands, neither were sure if they really believed Hermione about Snape, but they couldn't deny that someone had jinxed Harry's broom. No matter who it was, it was better to be safe than sorry.

XoX

Back in the locker room, Wood had taken Harry aside.

"Listen, Harry, I don't want to put any pressure on you, but if we've ever needed an early capture of the Snitch it's now. Finish the game before Snape can favor Hufflepuff too much."

"Don't worry, I'll focus all of my attention on the getting the Snitch," said Harry.

"Good, I need you to play even better than our last game."

"The whole school's out there!" said Fred Weasley, peering out the door. "Blimey – even – Dumbledore's come to watch!"

Harry frowned as he looked out of the door and saw the half-moon spectacles and long silver beard. "Huh, now that's interesting." It also begged the question, did he come just to watch? Or was he aware that someone had tried to kill him?

As they went out onto the field Harry took notice of the large scowling sneer on Snape's face, it was an impressive feat, he didn't

even know it was possible to combine the two expressions. It made him wonder if Hermione's belief that the greasy potions professor was out to get him were valid.

In the end he placed it in the back of their mind as the teams were launched into the air. He wasted no time in beginning to look for the Snitch, staying high above the match itself as he circled the pitch to spot that glint of gold.

Snape soon began to show his true colors as he immediately called a foul on George Weasley for hitting a bludger near the Hufflepuffs. Were it not for the fact that Harry had to search for the snitch, he would have made sure to take Snape out of his referee position for that.

XoX

"S-Snape's looking pretty angry," Neville stuttered. He had been deathly afraid of the potions master ever since school started. Hermione hardly paid attention to Neville as the match began and watched with crossed fingers.

"Well, well, well," a drawling voice said from behind them. Neville, Hannah and Susan turned to see Draco Malfoy along with Crabbe and Goyle grinning like Hyena's at them. "If it isn't Longbottom and Granger with their puff friends, and I thought these two were from the house of the cowards, oh, sorry, I meant the loyal. Aren't you two supposed to be showing loyalty to your House?"

Hannah and Susan shot glares at the blond boy.

"S – shut up Malfoy," Neville said.

"S – shut up," Malfoy said in a mocking voice. "And I thought you were from the house of the brave, Longbottom, or was it the house of the stupid?"

"Shut that trap of yours Malfoy!" Hannah snapped. "If you don't I'll hex you!"

"Oooh, you're gonna hex me, I'm so scared," Malfoy made a frightened face, then sneered. "We all know you Puffs have no guts, you couldn't hex a bug."

Faster than Malfoy could blink Hannah pulled her wand out of her robes and had it pointed at Malfoy. "Petrificus Totalus!" she intoned and Malfoy suddenly went rigid before falling off his seat and onto the floor. The two gorillas, Crabbe and Goyle, gaped for a moment before they seemed to pull themselves together. However, by then it was too late.

Two shouts of "Petrificus Totalus" sounded out behind them. The two slumped to the ground quickly, revealing a grinning Tracey along with a slightly smirking Daphne behind them.

"Hey!" Tracey said with a wave and a grin. "I saw that Malfoy was being a berk again and thought you could use some help!"

"Tracey, sit down," said Blaise in a slightly exasperated voice. "I'm trying to watch the game."

"Then watch," said Tracey, sounding slightly annoyed, "you don't need to pay attention to me."

"Thanks you two," Hannah said, eying them speculatively, "I was wondering where you three were."

"Oh we've been right here," Tracey said with airy indifference.

"We saw Malfoy sitting down behind you guys," Daphne added as she took her seat. Her tone was lukewarm, showing she was not as averse to speaking with them as she used to be. "We decided it would be in our best interest to follow them."

"Thank you," Hannah said as Susan nodded her own thanks.

"No problem," Daphne said.

A gasp from Hermione quickly brought their attention to her however. "Hermione, what is it?" asked Susan.

"Harry!"

All six students turned to see Harry make a spectacular dive, which drew gasps and cheers from the crowd. Hermione stood up, her crossed fingers in her mouth, as Harry streaked toward the ground

like a bullet. The other people that had befriended the young seeker watched in either shock, awe, respect or apprehension, wondering what kind of move he going to pull and hoping he would be alright.

XoX

Harry grinned as he shot right past Snape, making him turn towards where he had been in surprise. He figured it would serve the prick right for all the foul cheating and blatant favoring he had been doing. Harry only wished he could do more by kicking the greasy haired professor in the ass when he had passed by.

Oh well, at least he could dream.

He pushed his broom harder than he had even during his first match, bringing it to its max speed as he streaked towards the small golden Snitch at the ground. The little winged ball didn't even have time to move as he swooped in on it, clutching it in his grasp and grazing the grass as he pulled back up. As his broom rose again he held the hand with the snitch in it aloft, so everyone in the stands could see it.

The stands erupted into cheers; no one had ever heard of the Snitch being caught so fast, it had to be some kind of record.

XoX

Up in the stands Hermione and Neville were hugging each other, jumping up and down as they cheered.

"You know," Hannah said to Susan as she watched Harry fly around the pitch for everyone. "We may have lost, but I'm kinda glad, you know?"

Susan nodded in agreement, "Yeah, it wouldn't have been right with the way Snape was favoring us."

"And Harry was brilliant," Hannah added. "If anyone deserves this win, it's him."

"Now that, was a good game," Blaise concluded as he leaned back against the bench.

"Better than the last one?" asked Tracey with a grin.

"Maybe," Blaise said, "the last one was a bit embarrassing, since it was our own house that lost. But we also got to see a textbook Wronski Feint. This game was fast by comparison, but it showed that Harry wasn't wasting time."

"You and your Quidditch," Tracey said with a playful roll of her eyes.

Daphne looked over to where Harry was descending and had to stop the smile that threatened to break through her cold demeanor.

XoX

When he was a foot off the ground Harry hopped down and began making his way to the locker rooms in elation. The match had lasted barely five minutes, but he knew a part of his success was luck as the Snitch didn't usually show itself so early. But another part was also skill; the Hufflepuff Seeker had the same chance to spot and capture it that he did so he felt justified in the current pride he was feeling.

Before he could walk into the locker rooms, a hand placed itself on his shoulder. Turning, he saw Professor Dumbledore standing over him with a grandfatherly smile on his face.

"Harry, that was a most impressive match," he said kindly. "I had heard much about your prowess with a broom, but I feel reports were very much downplayed."

"Thank you, sir," said Harry, smiling a bit. He may be a little upset that Dumbledore was willing to bring something like the Philosopher's Stone to Hogwarts, but he could also feel the sheer amount of magic that Dumbledore had coming off him in waves, and he got the feeling that the old man was suppressing it. So even if he was a little angry with the man, he was still someone to greatly respect.

Nearby Snape landed, white-faced and tight-lipped as he spat on the ground and glared at Harry.

Almost as soon as he entered the locker room he was lifted up into the air as people around him began cheering. A little ways away Neville and Hermione were jumping up and down, and Neville

looked particularly excited about something. The students around him all congratulated him on a great game, speaking excitedly about how amazing he was. Like always, Harry accepted it with some amount of nonchalance, he knew he had done well, but didn't want to let the words of others inflate his ego.

An hour later he left the locker room alone, walking over to the broom shed to put his broom away.

He made it to the shed and stopped, looking up at Hogwarts as the sun set over it, casting a brilliant red upon the grand and imposing castle. He shook himself out of his trance and was about to put his broom away when he spotted Snape walking toward the Forest.

Harry frowned to himself, as Snape pulled a small hood over his head. What was he doing?

Flicking out his wand he cast a disillusionment charm over himself and his broom and took off into the forest, following the Slytherin Head of House. He watched as Snape ran into the forest and glided his broom in through the forest with him. He quickly followed to where Snape was going, weaving through the tree branches overhead in his effort to remain hidden. The Disillusionment charm was a great spell but it had one major weakness, whenever Harry moved there was a ripple effect around his figure. All Snape had to do was look at where he was moving and he would be caught.

He was surprised when, upon stopping, Professor Quirrell was waiting there for Snape. He quickly glided himself next to one of the branches and silently jumped off his broom, crouching down low as he tried his best to listen in.

"...d-d-don't know why you wanted t-t-to meet here of all places, Severous..."

"Oh, I thought we'd keep this private," Snape said in an icy tone. "Student's aren't supposed to know about the Philosopher's Stone, after all."

Harry scowled when he couldn't hear what Quirrell was saying due to the man's voice being just a soft mumble, and the man's face was hidden enough the he couldn't read his lips. Not that it mattered anyways, before the man could finish he was interrupted by Snape.

"Have you found out how to get passed that beast of Hagrid's yet?"

"B-b-but Severus, I –"

"You don't want me as your enemy, Quirrell," said Snape, taking a step forward.

"I-I don't know what you –"

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

An owl hooted loudly and Harry spun on a dime with his wand raised, he searched the area before turning back around to hear the rest of what Snape was saying, "- your little bit of hocus-pocus. I'm waiting."

"B-but, I-I-I don't –"

"Very well," Snape cut in, "we'll have another little chat soon, when you've had time to think over where your loyalties lie."

He threw his cloak over his head and strode out of the clearing. It was almost dark now and Quirrel's face was covered in shadow and his form was unmoving. Harry frowned before hopping back on his broom and taking off.

XoX

"Harry! Where have you been?" questioned Hermione once Harry had made it to the entrance to the common room. "We've been looking all over for you!"

"Sorry, Hermione," he replied embarrassedly, "I was just watching the sunset."

Hermione raised an eyebrow before Neville came up to him with an uncharacteristic grin. "Blimey mate, that game was incredible, the way you caught that Snitch so quickly. And you won't believe what else happened!"

"If you're referring to Daphne, Hannah and Tracey hexing Malfoy and his goons, then you'd be wrong," said Harry with a smirk. "I most definitely saw that."



"It was brilliant, wasn't it?" asked Neville with a goofy grin on his face. Harry had never seen the accident-prone boy so happy before. Not that he could blame him.

"It was," Harry nodded in agreement; most people would have never suspected a Hufflepuff would cast a curse on a Slytherin. It just showed that he was making a difference in breaking through house stereotypes.

"Now we should get to the party, everyone's waiting in the common room. Fred and George managed to knick some cake and other stuff from the kitchens."

"Right," said Harry, giving the password and entering the common room. The moment he entered he was swept up into backslaps from the guys and hugs and cheek kisses from the girls on his team, as everyone congratulated and or thanked him for the amazing match.

"Look who it is!" cried George.

"It's the man of the hour," said Fred.

"The incredible."

"The unbeatable!"

"Harry Potter!" they both finished.

Harry rolled his eyes at the two before grinning, he flicked out his wand and cast one of the more useless charms he had learned. Well, useless in most situations. For this one, it was perfect. Red and gold sparks went off and began to crackle and pop around the common room, several coalesced above their heads and took on the shape of a roaring lion. Everyone in the room cheered.

That night they all stayed up late, Harry had conversed with nearly everyone there, talking about the match or anything that took people's fancy. Conversing with so many people wasn't quite what he wanted to do; in fact before Lisa had come along Harry had been something of a loner. He was never rude to others, but he had never really talked to others either. Even with all of the changes he had

gone through after meeting Lisa and the effort he had been putting into making friends, it was still difficult sometimes.

Not that he had let anyone in on that fact. Harry had plans for Hogwarts, and those plans required that people not only respect him as a powerful wizard, but also respect and like him as a person. He needed the students behind him so that when he began using his influence to make more drastic changes to Hogwarts people would go along with it.

There was also the fact that making friends would build bridges once he was outside of Hogwarts. He had not yet formed any real plans for the Wizarding World as a whole yet, since he did not know enough about the world in general to make any plans. But having a lot of people in high and even low places of society that were willing to help him would make whatever ambitions he had that much easier. And so he conversed and socialized with everyone there, regardless of gender, age, year or social standing.

The only thing he did not converse about, and indeed became somewhat weary of, was when several of the second and third years started talking about how cute he was. Once it had gotten to the point where they started discussing how nice his butt looked when he flew, he knew it was time to leave and scrambled off to speak with other people, leaving the girls giggling at him as they continued their conversation.

Harry went to bed late that night, falling asleep on the couch sometime after the party. His last remaining thoughts not on the party, but on the Philosopher's stone. He had decided to keep the meeting between Snape and Quirrel a secret; if Hermione found out he was sure she would try and either confront one of them (which would be suicide even if she went up against Professor Quirrel) or she would do something equally brash. There was no way he was going to let something bad happen to one of his friends. Especially not when he was just starting to truly feel like he fit in.

XoX

So there you go, some minor changes to the story. Nothing too serious yet, but we did get a glimpse into Harry's mind at the end. He has plans, what those plans are I won't say. Suffice to say he is going to be changing things even more next year.

## Chapter 12: The Forbidden Forest

XoX

The next morning Harry awoke to the sound of giggling. Cracking one eye open just a bit he saw the grinning faces of Katie Bell, Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnett talking and giggling as they cast quick glances at him. They hadn't seemed to notice he was awake yet, and so he decided to close his eyes and try to listen in.

"Aw, look at him, he's so cute!" Angelina gushed.

"I know what you mean," Alicia added, "being that adorable should be illegal."

Harry felt like grumbling at being called adorable, it was so unmanly, but managed to keep his peace for now.

He heard a sigh and then Angelina asked, "What's with the dreamy sigh, Katie?"

"Is it a sigh of love, perhaps?" Alicia added, Harry could almost hear the grin in her voice.

"S-shut up! It is not!" argued a slightly stammering Katie. "Besides he's eleven."

"And your twelve," state Angelina, "your only a year older than him."

"And look at that face," added Alicia, "don't you just want to kiss it?"

"He's probably not interested in girls at this age," argued Katie. "Everyone knows women mature faster than men."

"You mean girls mature faster than boys," said Harry, deciding he had heard more than he wanted to and sat up. All three girls let out a loud shriek of surprise as he stretched a bit and then looked at them. "Now, if you three are quite finished talking about me, I just had a group of girls mentioning how cute my bum looked while I was flying last night, I have no desire to listen to this. So if you'll excuse me, ladies."

He left the three gaping and embarrassed witches as he made his way to the showers. Since it was a Sunday he decided he would go find a quiet room to work on his transfiguration with.

XoX

"Back off Malfoy!" Tracey said as she glared at the blond boy who was blocking her way. She and Daphne had just gotten back from the All-House Common Room, having been doing some studying with Padma and Hermione. They had been heading down to their own common room so they could put their homework away before heading to the Great Hall for lunch, when Draco Malfoy, along with Crabbe, Goyle, Nott, Millicent and Pansy had come out of a room to confront them.

It had been obvious to the two girls that the group had been waiting. Tracey glared at the group blocking them, trying to hide her nervousness at being so heavily outnumbered. Thanks in large part to Harry helping her, Tracey knew a few offensive charms that were above the first year curriculum. However she was still not very proficient in using them and did not want to test her luck, especially in a fight where she was outnumbered.

Beside her Daphne was staring at the group coldly. Her left hand was already resting on the wand in her robes, ready to pull it out if needed. Like Tracey she was worried, but unlike her best friend who was having trouble masking her fear, she would never let show just how worried.

"That's not a very nice thing to say to your own housemates, blood-traitors!" Pansy said with a sneer that would almost be worthy of Snape. Were it not coming from a little girl.

"Do you even know the definition of a blood-traitor?" asked Daphne, her icy glare turning on the pug-faced girl. Had she not been attempting to keep her cold demeanor up, the blond girl would have smiled as she saw Pansy visibly shiver.

"We didn't come here to fight," Theodore said. Theodore Nott was a weedy boy, tall and thin, though not quite as tall as Harry, and much less solid looking. He had brown hair and dark, beady eyes that were constantly shifting, giving him a paranoid appearance. "We just came to talk."

"I'm surprised your even hanging around these goon Nott," Daphne said in an icy voice. "You don't usually spend time with this crowd."

Nott frowned. "This is a House Matter."

Daphne raised an eyebrow. "So, talk."

"You've slipped from the Slytherin ways," Draco said, his voice pompous as he took the lead. "You two and Zabini have let yourselves disgrace the name of Slazar Slytherin, befriending yourselves with mud-bloods and blood-traitors alike."

"I think your just jealous that those so called blood-traitors are far better than you'll ever be," Tracey said.

"Did I give you permission to speak, Half-blood?" asked Draco, his sneer on full blast. Tracey stiffened a bit at being called out on her status. While Daphne and Blaise knew, and she had felt comfortable enough telling Harry, she had always tried to keep her status hidden from her house-mates. While being a half-blood wasn't anywhere near as bad as being a muggle-born, it still meant you were considered inferior in their house.

"I would suggest you watch your tone Malfoy," Daphne said after seeing her friend freeze. Her glare was enough to make the blond boy uncomfortable but he soon sneered.

"I could suggest the same... Greengrass," Draco said, "if you keep hanging with the wrong sort. You won't like the consequences." With that Malfoy and his ilk left, bringing a sigh of relief from the two girls that the fight hadn't escalated any further.

"Well, that was a surprising turn of events."

At the sound of a voice behind them the two girls let out a surprised scream and spun around -

- to come face to face with an amused Harry.

"Harry!" Tracey breathed out, a hand going to her heart. "Sweet Merlin, don't sneak up on us like that!"

"Sorry," Harry said, chuckling a bit. While her friend didn't seem to notice, Daphne saw the raven haired youth surreptitiously put away his wand. "I'll try not to surprise you in the future."

"Surprises are ok, so long as their the good kind," Tracey said with a wink. Harry just rolled his eyes a bit at the girls playful comment.

"What are you doing here?" asked Daphne. When Harry looked at her with a raised eyebrow she stammered a bit as she said, "not that I'm not pleased to see you. I was just curious."

Harry scratched the back of his neck for a moment. "I was actually practicing my Transfiguration down the hall," he jerked a thumb over his shoulder to point the direction he came from. "I was just about to head back to the Gryffindor common room when I saw you two being harassed by Draco."

"And like the good little Gryffindor you had to come to our rescue right?" said Tracey, a teasing grin on her face.

"I don't think being Gryffindor had anything to do with it," said Harry with a straight face. "I could never leave such fare damsels to suffer at the hands of a scarecrow, a ferret, his three Gorillas and his bitch."

Tracey began laughing at Harry's description of the group, which was surprisingly accurate. Daphne raised an eyebrow. "Who's the scarecrow and the third Gorilla?"

"Notts the scarecrow," Harry said, "kid looks like he'd be blown over by a stiff breeze. The third Gorilla is Bulstrode."

"Ah," Daphne nodded her head. Millicent was a black haired girl with a square, jutting jaw and a very large build. In fact, due to her bulk it was sometimes hard to tell that the girl was of the female gender.

"Say..." Tracey murmured as she realized something, "just how did you sneak up behind us anyways?" she had assumed Malfoy would have seen him and called him out. That he hadn't meant Harry had gone unnoticed even though the blond boy had been facing the direction Harry had come in at the time.

"Oh... I have my ways," Harry said mysteriously. Tracey pouted at not getting the answers she wanted but Harry was unaffected as he walked closer to the two. "Since it seems your having some trouble with your house, why don't I escort you two to where ever your going?"

"Would you do that Harry?" said Tracey, batting her eye lashes at him. "Your such a gentlemen."

"And the only lady in this hall is Daph," said Harry, smiling as Tracey turned a nice shade of red.

"You take that back!" the brunette shouted. However, by that time Harry had taken off, grabbing Daphne's hand on the way as he ran. "Potter!"

"You want me to take it back you'll have to catch me!" Harry shouted behind him. He looked over at Daphne who he had dragged along with him in his run. She looked amused.

"Did you have to insult my friend?" she asked as she ran with him.

"It's all in good fun, Daph," Harry said, just as another shout came behind them.

"Get back here!"

"Looks like we need to run faster."

Harry looked behind him to see Tracey gaining ground. "I noticed that," he said, picking up speed once more.

The trio ran all around the castle, through the halls, passing by several students who were walking along. It was surprising they hadn't run into Filch, considering the amount of noise they were making.

Harry and Daphne soon burst outside with Trace right behind them, with it still being winter the whether was still chilly. The snow had yet to leave the ground and the trio left foot prints as they ran. Eventually Tracey slumped from lack of energy, like most witches and wizards she wasn't in the best of shape, though she was more

active than some. Likewise Daphne was breathing heavily and leaning against Harry as she tried to regain her breath.

"I think she's done," Harry said, and Daphne noticed that while he was breathing a little heavier there was no noticeable difference in his countenance. It was as if he had not even run at all. She looked over at Tracey who was laying on her back, panting and had to agree.

"Your right."

The two walked up to Tracey who glared at them as soon as they came into view. "How... do... how are you not tired?" she asked.

"Exercise," Harry replied, "I actually enjoy exercising and do so every morning. Naturally, I have more stamina than most." Tracey stuck her tongue out at him. Harry was about to comment on how unladylike it was to stick ones tongue out, but before he could several snowballs came soaring at them.

Harry pushed Daphne onto the ground just as the snowballs were about to hit the pair, letting them sail overhead. "Who threw those?" Daphne wondered out loud, before several more snowballs came flying towards them. They had just enough time to get out of the way. Looking towards the area the balls came from the trio saw the Weasley twins and Lee Jordan snickering at them.

"Harry?" Daphne said, her eyes narrowing.

"Hmmm?"

"Are you any good in a snowball fight?"

"Dunno, never really been in one," Harry said as more snowballs came at them. He, Daphne and Tracey moved out of the way. Harry rolled along the ground, scooping up some snow at the same time and curling it into a tight ball. "But I'm more than willing to find out." With that he threw the snowball at the trio of Gryffindor boys who hid behind a tree.

Daphne and Tracey scooped up some snow, one grinning and the other coming as close to a grin as he had seen in public. Daphne



threw a snowball at the Lee, just missing as the boy dodged. "Good, because three on two isn't a fair fight."

With that the snowball fight truly commenced and Harry, Daphne and Tracey forgot about the girls confrontation with Malfoy and his goons.

XoX

The weeks soon began to pass in a blur; the snow had melted and spring came. There had been no more threats from Draco and his gang, though that may have been because Harry had made sure to keep an eye on his Slytherin friends when he could. Though if Harry were honest he was positive Draco was just full of hot-air, the boy was more the type for bluster rather than someone who would take action. Especially since the consequences of Slytherin fighting their own house, which according to Daphne, Tracey and Blaise was severe.

There had been no more attempts at getting past the stone and so Harry put it out of his mind for the moment. He soon fell in this familiar routine with small added bits to it. He would get up, exercise, eat breakfast, go to class, eat lunch, more class, have dinner and then either spend his time in the All-House Common Room with his friends, at Quidditch practice, training with Tonks, or his own Private training in Self-Transfiguration, an important step in becoming an animagus. His busy schedule had insured that he had no real time to concern himself with Philosopher's Stone even if he had wanted to.

It had only been recently that Harry finally felt confident that his transfiguration was good enough to start working on self-Transfiguration, he had even gotten Tonks' help after a small incident when he was trying to transform.

Harry had his eyes closed as he tried to focus and concentrate on the feeling of him and his animal becoming one, on the shift where he transformed into his animal. He had decided to go with transforming into a Black Panther first, it would likely be easier than a Griffin since no one knew a thing about their anatomy and he would be running blind once he began trying. At least with this he was well-versed in the animal he was trying to morph into.

The change started out slow, he could feel a small shift in his left arm and tried to focus on that feeling. He could feel his skin changing to fur as his hand became a paw and fur began to spread out. Unfortunately when his transformation was about to travel along his shoulder he found out that he couldn't complete the transformation. The feeling had gone.

Opening his eyes he saw that his arm looked like it was half-way between a man and a cat, it had black fur running down it and the hand and fingers were pawed, but the rest of the arm looked human, minus the fact that it had fur on it.

A frown marred Harry's face as he pulled out his wand and cast the spell he had found in a book to reverse Transfigurations. His frown increased when he watched his arm ripple a bit, but not revert back to its original form. Having never done this spell before he knew it may take a while before he got it down. He tried several more times, only to get the same result as his first attempt.

"Great," Harry sighed, "this totally sucks. Now what do I do?" Several thoughts on what to do passed through his mind, he could go to the hospital wing. But that would mean admitting to a teacher what he was attempting to do, and he wanted this to remain a secret. Likewise, he didn't want to tell McGonagall, who could easily reverse the transformation, for that same reason. That still left the problem of how to change his transformation back.

Just then the door open and Tonks strolled in, likely to use this place to train since it was the room they had decided to use for that purpose. "Oh! Hey Harry, I didn't know you were coming in...today..." she trailed off as she caught sight of his arm. "What in the name of Circe did you do to your arm!"

"Never mind that," Harry said with a groan. "Can you just help me fix it?"

"Yeah..." Tonks said, eying his arm apprehensively for a moment before she took out her wand. "Just hang on a second," a blue light shot from her wand and hit Harry's arm, the arm shifted and rippled as the thick hair dissolved into thin air and the paws transformed back into hands.

"Now what were you doing that would cause that kind of transformation, huh?" asked Tonks, hands on her hips as her face went into a stern expression. Well, as stern an expression as she could manage anyways.

"I was working on self-transfiguration," Harry replied, feeling a little embarrassed at being caught like this. "Guess I still have to work on it some more, huh?"

"B-but," Tonks stammered for a moment, her eyes wide as she pointed accusingly at him. "Self-Transfiguration is N.E.W.T. level work! How could you even think of attempting something so dangerous?"

"It's not that dangerous," Harry frowned, "it's just going to take a bit of work. And the spell to reverse it was bit more difficult than I had... hey!" he cheered up a moment later and was staring at Tonks with an odd gleam. "You're a metamorph right?"

"Um...yeah," she said dumbly, "how'd you know?"

"You mean aside from your hair changing color based on your mood?" asked Harry with a knowing grin. "The signs were all there, if one knows what to look for."

Tonks' shoulders seemed to slump. "Yea, I am. So, who do you want me to turn into?"

"What?" he asked, his expression morphing from excitement to confusion.

"To turn into," she repeated in a deadpan voice, "who do you want me to turn into?"

"No one," said Harry, frowning at her. "Why would I want you to be anyone but yourself?"

"You mean you're not gonna ask me to Transform into your dream girl or something?" asked Tonks' skeptically.

"Ok, first off, I don't have a 'dream girl'," Harry said, putting up quotation marks. "I'm eleven bloody years old, why is it that people keep asking me about what kind of girls I like. I swear, I've had at

least two third years and several second years try to ask me what I like in a girl, it's getting bloody ridiculous. Second, I don't really care that you're a metamorph, I mean it's cool and all, and I bet it's pretty useful, but the only reason I asked was because I thought you'd be able to help me with something."

"Oh," Tonks said for lack of having anything better to say. She paused for a moment before continuing, "so what's the third reason?"

"Third reason?" questioned Harry, "there is no third reason, just those two."

"What? But there's always a third reason," Tonks complained, "that's how it's done in the movies!"

"We're not in a movie, Tonks," Harry spoke as he rolled his eyes.

"I guess not," she replied, she seemed a little disappointed and her hair reflected that when it turned blue. However as was her nature, she perked up a moment later, her hair changing back to pink. "So, what was it you wanted me to help you with?"

"First, I need you to promise me that what I reveal to you will never be revealed to anyone else, under any circumstances," Harry said seriously. He didn't really like what he was about to do, this had been supposed to be a secret, but since he couldn't get the spell down he would rather tell someone he knew like Tonks, than any one of the teachers.

Tonks blinked at him for a moment, seeing the serious expression on his face. "This is pretty important to you, yeah?" she asked. Harry nodded and she held up her wand, "I...Nymphadora... Tonks, swear on my magic that I will never reveal what Harry James Potter tells me today to anyone else, so mote it be."

Harry gaped for a moment as he felt tendrils from Tonks' magic, but snapped out of his stupor quickly and said the proper phrase, "so mote it be." There was a flash of light, signifying the oath take hold.

"You didn't have to do that, Tonks," Harry said softly. "I would have just accepted a promise." While he himself had done a Wizarding oath to help Daphne, he had not expected to get the same from

anyone. A Wizards oath was very powerful and not something to be done lightly.

"I know," she replied cheerfully, "but this way there's no chance of me accidentally telling someone, and from the way you're talking, this is important."

"Well, I don't know about important, so much as I want to keep it a secret," Harry said. Then added, "for now, at least."

"So what is this big secret?" asked Tonks.

"I'm trying to become an animagus."

"Excuse me?" asked Tonks breathlessly, her eyes went so wide that Harry was sure they would just roll out of her orbital sockets. "Did you just say you're trying to become an animagus?"

"Yes," Harry said slowly.

"Harry," she started, "becoming an animagus is one of the singular hardest forms of transfiguration possible. That's above N.E.W.T. level work, most people are incapable of becoming one even if they have their own form."

"There not me," Harry said stubbornly. "I already know what my animal form is, and I've gotten to the point in Self-Transfiguration that I'm almost ready to make an attempt. All I need to do is practice, and once I can Transfigure myself into my animal, I'll begin combining my animal's psyche to myself."

"That's what you need me for, isn't it?" asked Tonks, suddenly realizing where he was going. "Because I'm use to transforming myself, I have the necessary visualizing abilities to revert you back in case you get stuck somewhere during your transfiguration."

"Exactly," Harry said excitedly.

"Well...alright, I'll help," she said, smiling before her look turned stern and she placed her hands on her hips. "But you are going to be helping me with my dueling skills even more for this, got it?"

"Yes, ma'am!" said Harry, saluting and tossing a playful wink. Tonks scowled a bit, though there was no anger behind it. She hit him playfully on the shoulder before they got to work.

XoX

Other than his new schedules most things stayed the same, he was also grateful that the end of the year exams were coming, because it meant Hermione had something besides the Stone to occupy her mind. She had started drawing up study schedules and then color coded all of her notes.

"Hermione," Hannah began, her voice showing her strained patience as they all sat around a table in the common room that Harry had Flitwick expand recently to account for the growth in people that often used it. "Not that we don't appreciate the effort you're going to, to help us study, but I really think you're going overboard."

"The exams are ten weeks away," Tracey added as she practiced floating a book and making it spin in a circle. "We have plenty of time to get ready for the tests."

"Ten weeks isn't all that long," Hermione said, "these exams are important. We need to pass these exams in order to get into our second year. I should have started studying months ago, I don't know what's gotten into me..."

"You need to relax," Blaise said lazily from where he sat, he had just finished his homework and had decided to stay with the others, it was almost odd how this place had turned into more of a home than his own common room. "All of us are in the top of our classes, literally, I don't think we really need to do much more than review."

What he said was true, the eleven students who were there were the top ranking students in their year, even Neville was near the top, if not in the top ten with them.

"I have to agree," said Lisa, everyone turned to look at her as she rarely ever spoke. "Your acting like you think we'll fail if we don't start cramming all the information we can into our heads. But the truth of the matter is, all of us have filled the top slots in our academics."

Hermione looked around to see similar nods of agreement, she felt herself losing ground, though she still felt her need to begin studying soon. She tried again, "but..."

"Hermione," Susan interrupted in her soft spoken voice, "my auntie always said that it's more important to relax and only do light reviewing before a test, then it is to try and cram everything we can within a few weeks. If we don't know everything we've learned by now, no amount of cramming will help us."

Hermione knew she was beginning to lose the battle but still stubbornly clung onto her beliefs, this was how she had always studied when at muggle school and it worked well for her, she was still second of her classes, right next to Harry.

"Harry, don't you think it would be better if we started studying now?" she asked, hoping he would put some sense into their friends.

Unfortunately for her, Harry hadn't really been paying attention. He looked up at her from the book he was reading, *Advanced Masking Charms for those who Wish to Remain Hidden*. "I'm sorry, what were we talking about?" he asked.

"Were you even paying attention?" Hermione snapped, honestly, sometimes she wondered how he was at the top of their classes when he didn't seem to do any studying. Come to think of it, she had never seen him study beyond books that were supposed to be too advanced for a first year to learn.

"I was saying we should start studying now," said Hermione, trying to get back to the point she wanted to make. Harry and his odd reading habits would have to wait, "that way we can be prepared when the final tests come."

Harry marked a page on his book, closed it and set it down. He looked at Hermione evenly before speaking, "listen, Hermione, I know you want to do well on these tests, but your stressing yourself out unnecessarily."

"Unnecessarily?" she asked icily.

"Yes," Harry replied simply. "Hermione, you are the second top student of our class, Daphne is third, Padma is fourth, everyone in

this group is at the top of our classes. The best thing you can do is lightly review your material each night, and rest during the day, if you stress out too much you'll be useless during the actual testing." He had seen it already, Tonks had spoken of several of her friends being sent to the hospital from the increased stress for their N.E.W.T. Testing. While first year tests couldn't compare with that, Hermione was acting very much like they were in their N.E.W.T. Year.

"But..."

"I'm not saying don't study," Harry interrupted, "but you have to do more than study otherwise you'll be so worn out during the actual test that you'll do worse than you would otherwise."

"I...I... fine," she sighed, her shoulders slumped a little. "I can see your point," Hermione looked over at her color coded notes, "and I spent so much time organizing those too."

"Cheer up," Padma said, "They'll still be useful in case you ever need to review your notes again. Now let's get the rest of our homework finished, the teacher's seem to be piling it on us like it's going out of style."

XoX

Harry put the book on advanced masking charms back on the shelf, he had just finished reading yesterday and would begin practicing the spells he had written down that he felt would be useful. He was about to leave the library when he noticed with some surprise, Hagrid picking out several books.

"Hey, Hagrid," Harry said from behind him, causing the half-giant to jump. "Found any good reads lately?" Truthfully he hadn't even known that the half-giant read as he didn't really seem the type.

"'Arry," he greeted nervously, hiding a book behind his back. "What are yeh doing here?"

"Looking for a good book," replied Harry. "What about you?"

"Oh the same as you I s'pose," he said, trying to sound evasive. "Well, I'll leave you to yer readin', 'arry," Hagrid quickly walked out of



the library, however, not before Harry saw the book on Dragons the man had been hiding behind his back.

That couldn't mean anything good and a part of Harry wanted to go and confront the man, but another part figured it wasn't really any of his business. He already knew Hagrid had something of an obsession for dangerous creatures, the mere fact that he would name a Cerberus of all things Fluffy made it all the more obvious.

Shaking thoughts of Hagrid out of his head, Harry made his way towards one of the unused rooms he knew of to practice his spells in. Along the way he ran into Neville who spotted him and immediately walked over.

"Nev, what happened to your face?" asked Harry. Noticing the boils on it.

"Malfoy," Neville said.

Harry's frown deepened, it wasn't hard to forget about the blond ferret, he had been waiting for Neville's answer but when it never came assumed the boy didn't want to retaliate. "It seems he really does need to be taken down several pegs," he said in thought.

"And I want to help," Neville said.

"You sure?" Harry asked, raising an eyebrow. "I'll do my best to keep you from being caught but there's no guarantee you won't get into trouble."

"I'm sure," Neville said, sounding more determined than Harry had ever heard him.

"Alright, follow me," Harry led Neville to an unused classroom and cast a silencing charm on the door. "Ok, now listen, here's what we're going to do..."

XoX

That night, Harry and Neville were in the same room as before.

"Here, Nev, put this on so no one sees you," he handed Neville his invisibility cloak.

"Wow," Neville said in hushed awe, "I've never seen an invisibility cloak before."

"Quick, put it on," Harry said. Neville did as told and was soon invisible.

Just in time too, a minute later Blaise came in, Draco Malfoy unconscious and bound floating behind him. "I hope you appreciate what I'm doing," Blaise said as he set Malfoy down. "It was a lot harder then it looked to get him out of the common room and across the castle unnoticed than one would think."

"I do," said Harry, and he meant it. In the Slytherin house, loyalty to the house was more important than anything else. Snape had told all the Slytherin's that they couldn't be seen squabbling with each other by the other houses, and getting caught doing so would get them severely punished. Blaise actually risking his neck for a pair of Gryffindors was a monumental thing, since the two houses had been enemies since the rift between Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor. "Thanks, do you want to stay and watch?"

"Nah," replied Blaise absently, "I figured it would be better to be surprised tomorrow."

"Alright, I'll see you later."

"Night," Blaise soon walked out of the door and closed it.

Harry absently flicked his wand at Malfoy, floating him up and began to walk towards the door. "Come on, Nev," he heard footsteps behind him as they left the room. They stopped at the door to the entrance hall, Harry pulled out a small disc that had a one foot radius and was several inches thick and a jar of super glue that he had brought for the All-House Common Room, just in case it was needed. He liberally coated one side of the discus in glue and floated it up to the wall where he stuck it to the side and then cast a disillusionment charm and a sticking charm on it. After wards, he vanished Malfoy's clothing until he was only in a pair of boxer shorts and a shirt, then cast a charm so both were a bright pink and had 'I Love Men' in bold red on the front of them. He floated Malfoy up to the disc and set Malfoy against the gluey side and cast a drying charm. When finished, he stopped floating Malfoy and made sure

that the glue would hold him indefinitely. Nodding in satisfaction Harry cast a silencing charm and then enervated the blond.

Draco Malfoy felt groggy as he woke up, the last thing he remembered was getting into his bed feeling extremely tired. He looked around for a moment, then his eyes snapped open, this was not his dorm room!

"Hello, Draco," a cheery voice said from above him.

Draco turned his head and noticed Harry, standing on the ceiling, no – wait – standing on the floor – he was upside down! Malfoy opened his mouth and began screaming but no words came out.

"Now, now, no need to get so angry," Harry chided, his tone light, as if he were just discussing the weather. "I only wanted to say hi before you went back to sleep," Malfoy looked confused and Harry smiled. "Now that I'm sure you're aware of your predicament, I figured it would only be polite to tell you why you're in it in the first place."

"You see, I'm good friends with Neville Longbottom, who you and your hired Gorillas have been picking on." Harry look turned cold, "This is the one warning I'm giving you to leave him alone, if you don't comply I will ensure that the next time we run into each other it will not only be much more painful, but infinitely more embarrassing."

Malfoy opened his mouth to speak and Harry chided him, "now, now Malfoy, I didn't say you could speak, I haven't finished yet. So, here is what's going to happen, I'm going to be putting you back to sleep, you are going to wake up tomorrow and you're going to stay like this until lunch. Everyone is going to see you in those...interesting undergarments you have on, and then the silencing spell will wear off. I don't particularly care what you do then, but I would suggest you keep your mouth shut or you may end up biting off more than you can chew."

The blond Slytherin turned pale as Harry pointed his wand at him, "good night, Malfoy. Stupefy," A red bolt was ejected from Harry's wand and slammed into Malfoy, causing him to slump in his upside down position.

"What do you think?" asked Harry.

"Brilliant," Neville said from inside his robes, "thanks for doing this Harry."

"No problem," Harry said, "now, let's get to bed."

XoX

The next morning the entire school got to laugh at the sight of a beat red Malfoy, covered in his hot pink 'I Love Men' underwear, stuck to the wall next to the door that led to the Great Hall. Harry and Neville both had smirks of satisfaction on their faces as they watched people falling over each other as they laughed their way into the Great Hall.

All of the teachers were trying to get a now crying Malfoy down but none could figure out how. They had all cast the finite command that would cancel any charms that might be sticking Malfoy to the wall, only the spell that stuck Malfoy to the wall was not on him but on the disc and he was stuck to the disc by super glue. No matter how many times a finite or one of the other counter-curses were applied to young Draco they never worked. None of the teachers could figure out what to do.

A few minutes into breakfast, Blaise, Daphne and Tracey came wandering in all of them wearing grins and laughing, well, Blaise and Tracey were, Daphne just had a smirk but that was as good as her laughing her ass off. As soon as they entered the Great Hall they spotted Harry and the others over at Ravenclaw table and made their way to it.

"Nice job, Harry," Tracey said in a whisper as she made Neville scoot over so she could sit next to the raven haired youth. "I'm very impressed."

"What makes you think I did anything?" asked Harry in an even voice as he ate, the small mischievous look in his eyes contrasting with his voice.

"Please, Potter," Daphne said with a roll of her eyes, "Blaise told us this morning that we would see an interesting sight, and only you

have the audacity to work with a Slytherin. He must have done something pretty bad to receive this type of punishment."

"He was picking on Neville again," said Harry, "I just figured I'd teach him a lesson."

"Remind me not to get on your bad side," the blond said jokingly.

Harry grinned in return, "I don't think you can, but if you ever do I'll let you know."

XoX

Classes went on as usual that day, by the time lunch rolled around the teachers had all but given up, there was a small note posted on the bulletin board, asking whoever was responsible to come forward. It was near the middle of lunch when the silencing spell finally wore off of Malfoy and he started screaming, "POTTER! POTTER DID THIS TO ME! IT WAS ALL HIM!"

The entire hall quieted down as the screaming continued, everyone turned to look at Harry who was still eating lunch as if he hadn't heard Malfoy accusing him of doing this to him.

"POTTER!" Snape stood and began stalking towards him, "you will let him down now!"

"I'm sorry Professor," said Harry, blinking up at him confusedly. "But what makes you think I did that to him?"

"Do you not toy with me, Potter!" Snape snarled. "I should have figured you'd have done this! I should have known it! You will let him down now! And one hundred points shall be taken from Gryffindor and detention for a month for this outrageous insult!"

"Severous!" McGonagall said sharply from behind the greasy potions professor, "it is not your job to hand out punishments to my students."

"He did this to my student!" Snape roared at the headmistress.

However, McGonagall ignored him in favor of Harry. "Did you do this to Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Potter?"

"Yes," said Harry simply, drawing a gasp from the entire Great Hall.

Snape looked like he was about to start shouting but McGonagall beat him. "May I ask why?"

"He's been torturing Neville for months now," said Harry. "We've had to take Neville to the Hospital Wing at least twice for boils, I decided Malfoy needed to learn a lesson."

McGonagall bristled a bit, "we do not allow students to punish other students, Mr. Potter. You should have come to one of the teachers, more specifically me."

"We couldn't go to you Professor McGonagall," Harry said mildly, surprising the Transfiguration teacher. "Had we gone to you, without any real proof, you would have not been able to do anything. We had gone to Professor Flitwick and he said he would have a talk with Snape about keeping his students under control, but it appears that their conversation had not done anything."

"Is this true, Filius?" asked Professor McGonagall.

"It is," said Flitwick, "Harry had come to me and mentioned Malfoy picking on Mr. Longbottom. I had a talk with Severous later that day." What Flitwick did not say was that it had been just yesterday that the raven haired young man had done this. The charms professor knew Harry was using him as something of a shield to get lighter punishment, but he could not find it in him to rat Harry out.

"I see," Minerva said, "Mr. Potter, though I applaud you for protecting your friends, your methods are deplorable. Fifty points from Gryffindor and detention with Mr. Filch, eleven o'clock tonight."

Harry watched as the points in the Gryffindor hourglass went down fifty points, truthfully it did very little in the grand scheme, Harry had earned over four hundred points himself for the house and they were in the lead by three hundred points. Not even Snape could reasonably give out more points than five other Professors without the others becoming suspicious.

"Minvera, I protest!" Snape said angrily. "You are being far too lenient on the brat, I must –"

"You must, Severous?" McGonagall asked icily. "What you must do is nothing, this is partly your fault to begin with for not reining in Malfoy's tendancies, and speaking of..." she turned back to Harry, "I must ask you to get Mr. Malfoy down, Mr. Potter."

"Sure," Harry said with a shrug as he stood up and walked to the entrance hall with Professor McGonagall. "Get your wand ready to catch him, Professor," he said as he brought out his own wand.

"Why?" asked professor McGonagall, though she still did as asked.

"Because I can only cast one spell at a time, Augmenti" a jet of water shot out of Harry wand and smashed into Malfoy, the teachers were too shocked to even yell at Harry while the students began laughing again. By the time the teachers had recovered, Malfoy had peeled off the disc and was falling towards the ground, screaming all the way. As it was, professor McGonagall was able to catch him just in time.

Harry walked right passed a fuming Snape and into the Great Hall to the cheers of the students, he gave a small bow and walked back to his seat, where his friends were looking at him with varying expressions of amusement, shock and awe, Hermione looked torn between wanting to lecture him and wanting to laugh at Dracos predicament.

"That wasn't a very good thing you did Harry," she said, her face trying and failing to look stern. "You could have been expelled."

Surprisingly enough, it was Terry that came to his defense. "Maybe, but at least it was entertaining."

XoX

At eleven o'clock that night, Harry made his way down to the entrance hall, after saying good bye to Neville and Hermione. Neville had felt bad for Harry and had offered to turn himself in, but Harry was adamant about not letting that happen. He knew what he was getting into, and that he would likely have to serve detention, and he didn't really care.

"I was counting on being caught, Nev," Harry confessed, much to the confusion of him and Hermione. Seeing this he elaborated by saying, "now everyone knows that you are under my protection and Malfoy knows that if he does something like this again, I will retaliate regardless of the consequences."

They seemed to accept that, though Neville still looked a tad reluctant.

After wards, Harry made his way down to the entrance hall.

Filch was already there – and so was Ron? Harry wondered what Ron had done to get himself detention, but didn't particularly care. There were two others who looked like third or fourth years with him.

Follow me," said Filch, lighting a lamp and leading them outside.

I bet you'll think twice about breaking a school rule again, won't you, eh." he said, leering at them. "Oh yes... hard work and pain are the best teachers if you ask me... It's just a pity they let the old punishments die out... hang you by your wrists from the ceiling for a few days, I've got the chains still in my office, keep 'em well-oiled in case there ever needed... Right, off we go, and don't think of running off, now, it'll be worse for you if you do." They marched off across the dark grounds. Ron was looking pale as Filch continued to talk about all of the 'punishment' they used to give out. Harry knew it was a load of crock, Fred and George had congratulated him on his first prank and told him not to worry about punishments, none were ever that serious.

The moon was bright, but clouds scudding across it kept throwing them into darkness. Ahead, Harry could see the lighted windows of Hagrid's hut. Then they heard a distant shout.

"Is that you, Filch. Hurry up, I want ter get started." Harry chuckled a bit at hearing Hagrid, if detention was with him then it likely wasn't all that bad. Filch heard the chuckle and said, "I suppose you think you'll be enjoying yourself with that oaf. Well, think again, boy – it's into the forest you're going and I'm much mistaken if you'll all come out in one piece." At hearing this, Ron let out a whimper. The other two students paled significantly.

The forest," one of them squeaked.



"We can't go in there at night – there's all sorts of things in there – werewolves, I heard," Ron looked like he was about to pass out. "A – and, I heard it was off limits."

"Oh, you've been given special privileges to go in." said Filch, his voice cracking with glee. "Should've thought of them werewolves before you got in trouble, shouldn't you." Hagrid came striding toward them out of the dark, Fang at his heel. He was carrying his large crossbow, and a quiver of arrows hung over his shoulder.

"Abou' time," he said. "I bin waitin' fer half an hour already. All right, Harry, Ron." Harry wondered how Hagrid knew Ron, but supposed it didn't matter.

"I shouldn't be too friendly to them, Hagrid," said Filch coldly, "they're here to be punished, after all."

"That's why yer late, is it." said Hagrid, frowning at Filch. "Bin lecturin' them, eh. 'Snot your place ter do that. Yeh've done yer bit, I'll take over from here."

"I'll be back at dawn," said Filch, "for what's left of them," he added nastily, and he turned and started back toward the castle, his lamp bobbing away in the darkness.

Ron now turned to Hagrid.

"I'm not going in that forest," he said, and Harry was pleased to hear the note of panic in his voice. It may be petty, but Ron had been as much of a problem as Malfoy, though do to his lack of influence with the other Gryffindors all it amounted to were petty insults.

"Yeh are if yeh want ter stay at Hogwarts," said Hagrid fiercely. "Yeh've done wrong an' now yehve got ter pay fer it."

"But the forest is supposed to be off limits!" Ron shouted in a loud, squeaking voice. "Students aren't supposed to go in there! Can't we copy down some lines or something?"

"Copyin' lines?" Hagrid asked. "What good's that ter anyone. Yeh'll do summat useful or Yeh'll get out."

Ron began to shake as he looked into the forest.

"Right then," said Hagrid, "now, listen carefully, 'cause it's dangerous what we're gonna do tonight, an' I don' want no one takin' risks. Follow me over here a moment." He led them to the very edge of the forest. Holding his lamp up high, he pointed down a narrow, winding earth track that disappeared into the thick black trees. A light breeze lifted their hair as they looked into the forest.

"Look there," said Hagrid, "see that stuff shinin' on the ground. Silvery stuff. That's unicorn blood. There's a unicorn in there bin hurt badly by summat. This is the second time in a week. I found one dead last Wednesday. We're gonna try an' find the poor thing. We might have ter put it out of its misery."

"And what if whatever hurt the unicorn finds us first?" asked Ron, unable to keep the fear out of his voice. Not that he had been trying particularly hard.

"There's nothin' that lives in the forest that'll hurt yeh if yer with me or Fang," said Hagrid. Harry noted that Fang didn't seem to agree with that statement. "An' keep ter the path. Right, now, we're gonna split inter two parties an' follow the trail in diff'rent directions. There's blood all over the place, it must've bin staggerin' around since last night at least."

"I want Fang," said Ron quickly, looking at Fang's long teeth.

"All right, but I warn yeh, he's a coward," said Hagrid. Ron paled. "Al'right then, so you and 'arry will stick together, yeh would be better in a group, and I'll go with these two. Now, if any of us finds the unicorn, we'll send up green sparks, right."

Get yer wands out an' practice now – that's it – an' if anyone gets in trouble, send up red sparks, an' we'll all come an' find yeh – so, be careful – let's go." The forest was black and silent. A little way into it they reached a fork in the earth path, and Harry went one way with Ron and Fang while Hagrid and the others followed the other path.

"So what did you do to get into so much trouble?" asked Harry, truthfully he didn't care, but it was better to talk than not right now.

"Why do you care?" snapped Ron, though his voice still sounded terrified.

"I don't," Harry replied evenly, "but I'm getting bored, and figured you might've had an interesting story."

He kept his eyes peeled as he checked his surroundings while they walked. Every now and then a ray of moonlight through the branches above lit a spot of silver-blue blood on the fallen leaves.

"I –" Ron was about to speak but Harry quickly covered his mouth.

"Quiet," he hissed out in a whisper, Harry closed his eyes and strained his ears to listen to the sounds of the forest. He had learned that when people were dispelled of one of their senses, the others increased to compensate. His efforts were rewarded when he heard – something – he couldn't determine what it was since it was so faint.

"Stay here," he commanded Ron as he rushed forward, moving swiftly and silently. By the time he had reached a rather large tree, the sounds had increased, it was a pained sound and he could only assume it came from the wounded unicorn. He took a peak out from behind the tree and what he saw disgusted him.

There was a unicorn, lying on its side, the only sign it was alive were the pained noises coming from it. Behind it was a cloaked figure, kneeling down and it looked like it was, eating, the unicorn.

"What the bloody hell is that!"

Harry's eyes widened as he heard Ron's loud shout, but had no time to scold him as the cloaked figure stood up and looked at them, slick, silvery blood dripping down its front. Ron ran off but Harry didn't notice, for as soon as the cloaked figure looked at him pain exploded from his scar.

Harry hissed as he dropped to his knees, one hand going up to his scar. It hurt far more than it ever had before, completely catching the raven haired youth by surprise. He watched as the creature stalked towards him and, with a grunt of effort pushed past his pain and flicked his wand.

"Stupefy!" he shouted as a red bolt of light shot from his wand's tip. He was surprised when a shield blocked the spell, and was even more surprised when a sickly yellow spell shot from the cloaked figure's robe. Harry quickly jumped out of the way, and ran towards one of the trees, casting two more stunners as he went. He just made it behind the tree when a yellow spell hit it, a hissing noise drew Harry's attention to the spell and he saw that it was melting through the tree. He made himself a note to never get hit by that particular spell.

He needed a plan, whoever he was fighting was better than he was, that much was obvious. This person also had more knowledge of spells, darker ones if the yellow spell he used was any indication. Harry ran through several scenarios in his mind, quickly coming to the one he felt would work best. Counting to three he ran out from his cover, the figure was already sending that yellow spell at him but Harry dodged and shouted, "Reducto!" sending a powerful blast of energy at the figure.

His opponent raised a shield but Harry wasn't aiming for him, instead his spell hit the ground just before the shield. The hooded figure went flying from the kinetic force the explosion caused and Harry cast a quick "Stupefy!" at the being. However, it seemed to be for naught as his spell was blocked again.

Harry got ready as the creature held what he now saw was a wand, before the sound of galloping hooves brought its attention to what looked like a half-man half horse. Harry recalled seeing it in one of the books he had looked up information on a Griffin in, a Centaur.

The Centaur charged at the figure and Harry watched as it was driven away. The centaur turned to Harry but he was already moving toward the unicorn, kneeling down next to the creature.

"It's ok," Harry whispered as he gently laid a hand on its snout when it tried to move away from him. "I'm not going to hurt you." Harry looked at the nasty gash on its side, it was a fairly large wound. He waved his wand over the wound, "Episkey."

Harry watched as the wound glowed light silver as it tried to heal. However, it looked like the spell couldn't deal with a wound this large. Harry growled as he tried again, and again and again but to no avail.

"Damn it! Why isn't this working!" Harry said.

"It is the fate of her to pass this day," said the Centuar. "It has been written in the stars."

"Shut up!" Harry snapped, he threw his wand on the ground, it was useless right now anyways. "I'm not going to let her die, and not the stars, nor fate can tell me I can't save her!"

He placed his hands just above the wound and grabbed hold of his magic directly, before forcefully pushing it out. His hands began to glow a light greenish silver as he focused his thoughts on the wound, imagining the wound healing and closing. He had never attempted to heal someone other than himself with his magic, and normally all he did was direct it towards his wounds and it seemed to know what to do after wards. This was different, he was attempting to directly heal someone else by using the same visualizing technique he used for all his wandless magic.

It was also draining, Harry could feel himself becoming exhausted as his magic poured out of his hands and into the unicorn. He ignored the sounds of more galloping as two more Centuars came upon the clearing, only to stop and watch him. He watched as the wound began to close, blackness started to seep around the edges of his vision but he pushed it back, he would not allow such a beautiful creature to die if he had any say.

Finally, after what felt like hours to Harry but in truth was only a few minutes, the wound closed. Harry slumped forward, his head falling onto the unicorns torso, sweat falling freely from him as he tried to gather a labored breath. he was able to weakly reach into his robes and withdraw a small vial of pepper up potion, popping it open and downing it's contents.

He felt an infusion of energy and sat back up, it was only temporary relief but it would be good enough until he could reach a bed. Looking back down at the unicorn he saw that its eyes were on him, he reached out with a tentative hand and was relieved when the unicorn nuzzled into it ever so slightly.

"Do you realize what you've done!" roared one of the centuars, causing Harry to look up at him.

"Are you talking to me?" asked Harry blankly.

"You just defied the fates!" the centaur said angrily, ignoring Harry's questions. "You have upset the balance!"

"I just saved the life of an innocent creature," Harry responded, somewhat annoyed that this centaur was more interested in fate than that of an innocent life. "And I don't care about fate. Fate is an excuse not to do anything to help others."

This seemed to greatly anger the centaur, "You –"

"That is enough, Bane," said the first centaur who had found Harry.

"You would side with this human!" questioned the one known as Bane angrily. "He has just defied the stars, it was the fate of –"

"I said that is enough," the first centaur said again, "we do not know for sure that the stars said it was the fate of this pure creature to die. Had it been so, then there would have been nothing he could have done."

"I would suggest you leave, now," he continued to Bane. "I will ensure that the young Potter boy makes it back out of the forest."

"I will not forget that you sided with a human this day," Bane said before galloping off.

"Thank you," Harry said softly. "He was getting annoying."

The centaur inclined his head. "Bane and I do not always see eye to eye," he replied.

"I don't think I caught your name," Harry said.

"I am called Firenze."

"Nice to meet you," said Harry, not noticing the surprise in Firenze's eyes. "I'm Harry, though, from the sound of it I guess you knew that."

"Your name is well known amongst all those in our world," said Firenze. "When you received that scar the moon held an ominous light." Harry wasn't quite sure what he meant when he spoke of the

stars and moon but assumed he meant divining the future from astronomy.

"Do you know what that was?" asked Harry, changing the subject as he continued to run his hand across the unicorn's mane. "That – that thing who attacked the unicorn?"

Firenze hesitated for a moment before asking, "do you know what unicorn blood is used for –"

"I know what it does," Harry responded with a frown. "It's supposed to make those that who drink it immortal, it can cure any wound, even when one is at death's door. But it's said to be a cursed existence. Killing a unicorn is one of the greatest crimes you can commit, and the price of one who drinks the blood of a unicorn is a cursed half-life."

"That it is exactly," said Firenze.

"So then who – who would do something like that?" asked Harry.

"Can you think of nobody who has waited many years to return to power, who has clung to life, awaiting their chance?"

"I –" Harry's eyes widened, "you mean Voldemort, don't you?" at Firenze's nod, he said, "I had thought he was dead?" Harry had not seen what happened to Voldemort after he had been hit with the avada kadavra, the magical backlash of getting struck with that spell had knocked him out, at least that's what he figured because the first thing he remembered after waking up was being at the Dursley's.

"Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die."

"So if that was Voldemort, then he's the one whose after the Philosopher's Stone, isn't he?" asked Harry. Suddenly things made sense, "with the elixir of life Voldemort could come back!"

"That is indeed my thoughts," Firenze agreed.

"Arry!" The two turned as Hagrid burst in through the bushes with Ron, Fang and the two other students behind him. "Arry, are you a'ight?"

"Fine, Hagrid," Harry said as he looked up from where he was, he noticed that Ron and the two students were staring at him in shock as he sat next to the unicorn, but didn't pay them more than a glance. He looked at Hagrid as the large giant came up to him to check on the unicorn. "Is it going to be ok?" he asked.

The unicorn watched wearily as Hagrid checked it over, relaxing when the half-giant stood and said, "she'll be jus' fine with o' little bit o' rest."

"How long will it take for her to recover?"

"Bout a week, I'd guess," said Hagrid.

"But what if vol – I mean, what if whoever attacked her comes back?" asked Harry, correcting his small mistake, it wouldn't do for anyone to know Voldemort was returning to life.

"I will tend to her and protect her," Firenze said.

Harry looked over at Firenze. "Thank you," he said.

That night Harry went to bed, his thoughts on the Stone and the man who had killed his parents.

XoX

The prank idea was not mine. I sent a message to LignumVitae86, who came up with the original pranking idea. At least I think he did. I did add my own touch to it, the pink underwear with I love men written on it. I would imagine that since Wizarding Society is a lot more bigoted, homosexuality would be greatly looked down upon, especially for the heir of a pureblood family like the Malfoys.

Anywho, I am now going to work, later.



## Chapter 13: A Meeting of Two Forces

XoX

The next day what had happened was all over the school, the two students whose name's Harry never caught, had leaked knowledge that Harry had found a unicorn and come up with some story that he had saved it from some kind of monster. Funnily enough, though neither of them knew it, they were somewhat accurate about that part, if not how he had saved it, then been saved in turn.

Once again he had been the cause of much whispering around the school and had been forced to give his friends an account of what really went down. Needless to say they were fairly shocked.

"Wow, that's really some story," Hannah said, her voice an awed whisper.

"You know if you were anyone else, I wouldn't believe you," Tracey said.

"And because I'm me, you do?" asked Harry. He had only told them the basics of the story, how he had nearly been killed by some creature (Harry felt it was perfectly reasonable to call Voldemort a creature) and had been saved by a Centuar. He had left out the part about the Dark Lord being the one he had fought. There was no need to let them know and possibly cause them to panic.

Still, while he had not told them everything the story was still outrageous, even if it was true.

"Yes," Tracey said simply. The others had all expressed similar opinions.

XoX

The next few days passed in a bit of a blur, Harry kept up with his usual schedule. His Transfiguration training with Tonks had finally born fruit.

"Are you sure about this, Harry?" asked a nervous Tonks. Harry hadn't been able to see much of her anymore, with the N.E.W.T.s

coming up she had stopped their training sessions and she only came when he begged her too.

"I'm positive," said Harry, "I'm ready to try for becoming my animal." He had just managed to Transfigure himself into a Black Panther, the one he had seen in his dream a few days ago, and he was now ready.

"Alright, just, be careful kay?" Tonks said nervously. She wouldn't admit it, but Harry was easily her best friend, the one person in Hogwarts that knew she was a metamorph, but didn't want her to be anyone other than herself. That meant a lot more to her than words could express.

"Right," Harry closed his eyes and slowed his breathing as he began attempting to connect to his inner animal, well, one of them. He grunted in a bit of – it wasn't quite pain, but it was distinctly uncomfortable – as he felt his form shifting, his legs became shorter and more muscular, his hair turned into black fur and began to spread across his back, arms and legs. His face began changing, he could feel his nose turning into a muzzle. Then it stopped –

- his face was now what looked like some kind of human-panther chimera.

"Uh oh, hold on a moment," Tonks said, waving her wand and reversing his change.

"Damn, that hurt," Harry grunted. "Alright, let's try that again."

"You sure, Harry?"

"Yes."

It took five more tries before Harry was able to finally complete his transformation, each transformation he did he learned a little more on what to do and what not to do. He felt himself getting closer to his animal with each try, and the fifth one, he finally completed his transformation, it was as if something had clicked in his mind. He felt differently, his emotions were different, he had instincts he never felt before.

"Core," Tonks whispered in awe as Harry stalked around the room on his four limbs. He could feel his instincts in the back of his mind, the desire to go out and hunt, but suppressed them for now as he examined how he perceived the world around him. His sight was beyond amazing, he could see things far more clearly than he ever had as a human, his sense of smell was unbelievable, he was even able to smell the Shampoo Tonks had used to shower with this morning. He felt powerful, it was an amazing, heady feeling and he promised himself he would go into the forest sometime after his tests were done to test out the full extent of his new form.

He looked over at Tonks and if he could, he would have grinned as he stalked over to her and jumped. Tonks let out a shrill shriek as he landed on top of her and she fell under his weight.

"Get off," she said, looking at him with a stern expression. He shook his head and began to lick her face. "Ugh, get off, Harry," she shouted as she tried to push him off, but with him being several dozen stones heavier than she was now, it was an impossible task.

Finally, after much screaming from Tonks, he reverted to his original form and grinned at her. "So what you'd think?" he asked, "pretty cool, huh?"

"Yes, yes, now could you get off me?" asked Tonks, were it not for the grin on her slobber covered face he would have thought she was disgruntled.

"Fine," Harry sighed and crawled off her, standing up and stretching out. An 'eep!' brought his attention back to Tonks, "something wrong?" he asked when he saw his pink haired friend, well, red haired friend now, holding her hands to her face as she covered her eyes. Though every now and then he could see one eye peeking through the cracks in her fingers.

"P-put some clothes on!" she shouted.

Harry looked down to see that his clothes were gone, he looked over to see they were over where he had originally transformed. How had he not noticed that? And why were his clothes missing? He had read in the animagus book that when he transformed back they would be on him!

"Harry!"

He blushed before he ran over to his clothes, "R-right!"

XoX

Later that day Harry was wondering the school aimlessly, he didn't have to study for the exams like everyone else did, and he figured his attempt at the Griffin transformation should wait until he was used to his Jaguar form, he would go into the forest tonight and begin stalking around.

He went outside to enjoy the sun when he noticed Hermione coming from Hagrid's hut. It seemed that she noticed him too, because she quickly ran up to him. "Harry! Harry, I have some more news about the Stone!"

"Hermione," Harry groaned, "I told you not to snoop around about that anymore."

"But, Harry, just listen," she pleaded. Harry sighed as she gave him the dreaded puppy-dog eyes; they were just as effective on her as they were on Lisa!

"Fine," he said, "go ahead."

"I was talking with Hagrid," she started off in a fast pace. "Do you remember Ron's bragging?"

"Some," Harry said, "he tried to tell everyone that he had saved the unicorn." That hadn't gone over well with everyone else at Hogwarts, since the news that it had been Harry who saved the unicorn came from two other sources, and Ron was notorious for being a braggart and a liar.

"No, before that," she said.

"Not really," Harry shrugged, "I wasn't paying much attention."

"He had been saying that he had helped Hagrid smuggle a dragon out of school to his brother Charlie."

That caused Harry to pause as he remembered Hagrid coming to the library and grabbing a book on Dragons. He hadn't known about that but figured it was why Ron had gotten into trouble. "Go on," he said.

"Well, turns out that it was true. I had asked Hagrid about the Dragon and he said that he had won it off a cloaked figure in a pub –"

"And your thinking that this cloaked figure is the same one that I ran into in the Forest?" asked Harry. "You do know a lot of people wear cloaks right? Especially wizards?"

"I know, but just listen!" she said with a scowl. "I think it's the same person because he was apparently asking questions about Fluffy." Harry had a sinking feeling as she continued, "and Hagrid told the man that the Cerberus could be put to sleep by playing it music."

"And? What do you want me to do?" asked Harry. "Even if it is the same person, what do you expect us to do?"

"Tell Professor Dumbledore," she said.

"He probably already knows," Harry had come to the conclusion that all of the portraits and ghosts reported their findings to the venerated Headmaster, no one as intelligent as Dumbledore was supposed to be would not use the vast information network they granted to good use. He doubted there was anything that truly went on at Hogwarts that the man didn't notice. That was part of the reason the room he had chosen for his training with Tonks and his Transfiguration practice was far away from any paintings, and he used a nifty charm he had found to keep ghosts out.

"But what if he doesn't?" asked Hermione, "what if he has no clue about what's going on?"

"Hermione," Harry said placatingly, "even if he didn't, no one would be stupid enough to try and take the stone while he was here."

"But –"

"Look, if it helps, we'll go see Professor Dumbledore after the exams," said Harry. "They're tomorrow, I'm sure the Stone will stay until then."

"Alright, fine," she said, "but if the stone gets stolen I'm blaming you."

XoX

The next day the exams started, they had all been taken to a large classroom where they were given special quills that were designed to keep them from cheating with anti-cheating spells and then had to do their written tests. Harry was the first one to finish all his tests, completing them within thirty minutes, much to the shock of the examiners who were giving them.

They were all given practical's as well. Professor Flitwick called them one by one into his class to see if they could make a pineapple tap-dance across a desk. Professor McGonagall watched them turn a mouse into a snuffbox – points were given for how pretty the snuffbox was, but taken away if it had whiskers. Professor Sinistra had asked them all to map out the stars they had studied, and Professor Sprout had made them tend to several plants of her choosing. Snape made almost everyone nervous, breathing down their necks while they tried to remember how to make a Forgetfulness potion.

Harry managed to destroy the record for the tests given, when asked to make the pineapple tap-dance, he did that and then made it do a Hungarian dance and several acrobatic feats, getting a loud clap from Professor Flitwick. The snuffbox Harry had made from Professor McGonagall had been one of the most beautiful she had ever seen; with brilliant red and gold colors and ornate designs and patterns along the box, made from silver and with the Hogwarts Coat of arms on the front. The smile he had got from the beautiful dark skinned astronomy Professor when she looked at his work let him know he had done good, and though Harry was sure that Neville had done better than him in Herbology, the Hufflepuff head of house had nothing but good things to say about him. However, it was Snape's test that really brought a smile to his face, more specifically the nasty scowl that the potions Professor had given him when he had turned in an absolutely perfect Forgetfulness potion, placed in a vial with an unbreakable charm on it. Just in case.

Their very last exam was History of Magic. One hour of answering questions about batty old wizards who'd invented self-stirring cauldrons and they'd be free, free for a whole wonderful week until their exam results came out. When the ghost of Professor Binns told them to put down their quills and roll up their parchment, Harry couldn't help cheering with the rest.

That was far easier than I thought it would be," said Hermione as they joined the crowds flocking out onto the sunny grounds. "I needn't have learned about the 1637 Werewolf Code of Conduct or the uprising of Elfric the Eager." Hermione always liked to go through their exam papers afterward.

"See," Harry teased with a grin, "I told you, you needn't study so hard."

"You did," Hermione admitted with a mock scowl.

The large group of first years all went outside and Harry and his friends made their way to the lake, where the Weasley Twins and Lee Jordan were tickling the underside of the giant squid's tentacles as it basked in the warm shallows.

"Ahhh, I'm so glad that tests are over," Tracey said, flopping down on the grass and stretching. "Now we've got an entire week free from having to do anything."

"So then, what are you going to do?" asked Susan, following the Brunette Slytherins example and laying on the grass.

"What else? Relax," she replied with a grin.

Harry yawned as he laid himself down on the grass next to Susan and Tracey with the others following suit. Conversation continued for half an hour as they all talked about how glad they were that class was finally over. Hermione had passed him several glances, he knew what she wanted but ignored her for now. He wanted to relax before she dragged him around to find Dumbledore.

Eventually, they all got up and began to disperse, a few asked Harry if he wanted to do go with them to what was now being referred to as the AHCR, or the library, but he told them he had previous

engagements and promised he would spend more time with them tomorrow.

"Alright, let's go see Professor Dumbledore," Harry said to Hermione.

"You know you don't seem too concerned that someone might be trying to steal the Sorcerer's Stone," she said, a frown marring her face.

"I just don't want to get involved," replied Harry as they looked around. The two of them went around several different corridors as they looked for Dumbledore's office. Unfortunately, even Harry didn't know where the headmaster's office was and they had been looking for several minutes.

"We'll just have to -" Harry began, but a voice suddenly rang across the hall.

"What are you two doing inside." It was Professor McGonagall, carrying a large pile of books.

"We want to see Professor Dumbledore," said Hermione, in brave voice.

"See Professor Dumbledore." Professor McGonagall repeated, as though this was a very fishy thing to want to do. "Why?"

"It's sort of secret," she said, but looked like she wished she hadn't, because Professor McGonagall's nostrils flared.

"Professor Dumbledore left ten minutes ago," she said coldly. "He received an urgent owl from the Ministry of Magic and flew off for London at once."

"He's gone." said Hermione frantically. "Now."

"Professor Dumbledore is a very great wizard, Mr. Granger, he has many demands on his time –"

"But this is important."

"Something you have to say is more important than the Ministry of Magic, Mr. Granger?"



Hermione opened her mouth, likely to make up some other excuse but Harry beat her. "Hermione, here thinks that someone's trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone," he said plainly.

Whatever Professor McGonagall had expected, it wasn't that. The books she was carrying tumbled out of her arms, but she didn't pick them up.

"How do you know -" she spluttered.

"Let's just say that some secrets are horribly kept and leave it at that," said Harry.

"Professor," Hermione began, "we know that sn – that someone is trying to steal the stone, and need to speak with Professor Dumbledore."

"Professor Dumbledore will be back tomorrow," she said finally. "I don't know how you found out about the Stone, but rest assured, no one can possibly steal it, it's too well protected. Now, why don't you two enjoy the sunshine?"

"See," Harry said as McGonagall walked off, "nothing to worry about."

"But Dumbledore's gone!" said Hermione, "with him gone there's nothing to stop Snape from trying to steal the stone!"

"Not this again," Harry groaned, "look, the Professor said it was well protected, that means there are other protections besides the Cerberus."

"That Snape helped create," she said, "he's going to steal it, and with Dumbledore gone he has the perfect opportunity."

"And what do you expect us to do, Hermione?" he asked evenly. "We're students, Snape's an adult. If we interfere we'll likely have to fight him, and I don't think a couple of first years can beat a Professor."

"We just need to get the Stone before he does," she said, "he's going to steal it tonight, so we need to get to it first."

"Hermione –"

"If you're not going to go, I'll go alone," she said determinedly.

Harry stared at her for several seconds before shaking his head and chuckling, "you have got to be the brashest person I have ever met." While he despised the sorting system he suddenly knew just why Hermione was placed in Gryffindor. "Alright, I'll go with you." Not like he had much of a choice, he couldn't just let her go off on her own. She was a friend, and friends don't abandon each other even when they do something stupid.

"Thank you," she said softly.

"Don't worry about it," he responded. "Now, why don't we go see everyone in the AHCR? We'll have to wait until later tonight to get the Stone anyways, or people will get suspicious."

XoX

Later that night he met Hermione in the Gryffindor common room and were about to leave when they were confronted by Neville.

"What are you two doing?" he asked.

"Nothing," Hermione said quickly.

"Don't lie to me Hermione," he said, "you're going after the Philosopher's Stone, aren't you?"

Harry sighed as he turned a mild glare on Hermione. "Telling people else about the Stone's existence, are we?" Hermione's blush let told Harry all he needed to know. With a mildly exasperated sigh he asked, "so what now?"

"I'm going with you, what else?" he said.

"Neville?" Hermione said in surprise.

"You two have been my friends since we got here," he said, "I won't abandon you when you need help."

"Thank you," she said, sniffing a little.

"Come on," Harry said, interrupting anything Neville had to say. "If we're going to go we should go now."

They made it out of the common room and Harry pulled a cloak out of his robes, "under the cloak."

"Harry, where did you get an invisibility cloak?" Hermione asked as she got under the robes.

"Family heirloom," he said, leaving it at that.

The three went down the stairs, through several corridors and down more stairs. A few seconds later, they were there, outside the third-floor corridor – and the door was already ajar.

When they got inside it was to see a harp playing music and the large three-headed dog sleeping soundly.

"Oh no," Hermione whispered, "Snape's already gone down."

"Well, then I guess we're going down," said Harry, "unless you want to turn back."

"No, we have to make sure he can't get the stone," she said, setting her jaw in determination.

"Fine," sighed Harry, there was really no way he could win with this girl. Well, he could probably knock her out and tie her up, but then she would be mad at him.

He heard the harp stop and quickly charmed it to continue playing. The dog didn't even shift.

Harry opened the door and looked into the darkness. "Who should go in first?" asked Hermione.

"No one," said Harry, "first, we see what's down there. Lumos," he whispered. Harry brought his wand down into the trapdoor and saw a large writhing plant.

"Devil's Snare," Neville gulped.

"Well, now that we know what we're up against," Harry mused. "Devil's Snare hates fire and sunlight, so..." positioned himself better and held the wand in a two handed grasp. "Nox! Incendio!"

As a large and continuous stream of fire shot from Harry's wand a loud shriek sounded from below, Harry was surprised, he didn't think plants could make any kind of noise, much less the shrieking sounds he was getting now. Then again this plant was magical.

After several seconds he canceled the spell and looked at his two companions. "Ok, here's what we're going to do," he said. "we'll need to levitate each other down," he flicked his wand at Hermione, getting a small shout of surprise as she floated in the air. "Neville, float me and Hermione, float Neville – good – now Neville bring me down first, I'll tell you when I reach the bottom."

Harry watched as darkness closed over him, he was tempted to cast a lumos spell but he couldn't do that one wandlessly. He wondered how long it would take to reach the bottom, he couldn't be sure thanks to the Devil's Snare having obscured his vision during his glance. Eventually, he felt his foot touched the floor.

"Ok!" Harry called, "Hermione, float Neville in next!" It took several minutes for all three of them to get to the bottom. "Alright, this way," he made his way down a stone passageway, which was the only way forward.

All they could hear apart from their footsteps was the gentle drip of water trickling down the walls. The passageway sloped downward, and Harry heard a soft rustling and clinking seemed to be coming from up ahead.

"What's that?" asked Neville nervously.

"Sounds like," Harry closed his eyes, "beating wings?"

"There's light ahead," Hermione said, "I can see something moving."

They reached the end of the passageway and saw before them a brilliantly lit chamber, its ceiling arching high above them. It was full of small, jewel-bright birds, fluttering and tumbling all around the

room. On the opposite side of the chamber was a heavy wooden door.

"Look at all these keys," Neville whispered.

"Do you think they'll attack us?" asked Hermione, sounding fearful.

"Not likely," said Harry, frowning as he pointed to something a little to the left. "Look at that broom, their probably charmed to react when we touch the broom." With that he walked over to the door, he tried to open it but was unsuccessful.

"Alohamora," he said before attempting to open it again. "The door has a high level locking charm on it." A very high level charm in fact, it was likely the work of Dumbledore, though Flitwick was probably good enough to cast this charm. Whoever cast it, it was beyond Harry's ability to break.

"So what do we do?" asked Neville.

Harry grinned, "It's not what you do, and it's what I do." He looked at the broom, "it looks like I'm about to find out whether I really am the best Seeker Hogwarts has had in a century."

The moment his hands touched the broom, all of the keys that had been fluttering about began to attack him. Harry shot off the ground like a bullet, keeping himself ahead of the keys as he searched for any sign of the key that might fit in the key whole. It took a while before he noticed a large silver key that had a bent wing, as if it had already been caught and stuffed roughly into the keyhole. Harry streaked after it; it sped toward the wall, Harry leaned forward and with a nasty, crunching noise, pinned it against the stone with one hand. Neville and Hermione's cheers echoed around the high chamber.

Flying down Harry shoved the key in Hermiones hand and took off again. "Go unlock the door!" he shouted as the keys continued to chase him. He wove around the room, dodging and spinning, corkscrewing and twisting his way around in an attempt to dodge the attacking keys. It was difficult then he had first thought it would be, they were more tenacious than a pair of bludgers and several hundred times more numerous.

Hermione hurried to do as told, jamming the key into the lock and twisting it. There was a click, and she pushed the door open. "Harry! It's open!" She shouted as Neville ran through the door. The bushy haired witch held the door open long enough for Harry to fly through it, then slammed it close. The sound of keys impaling themselves on the door came a second later as Harry got off the broom.

The trio set off again, moving along the corridor until they reached another door.

"Ready?" Harry asked the other two, placing his hand on the next door. They nodded. He pulled the door open.

The next chamber was so dark they couldn't see anything at all. But as they stepped into it, light suddenly flooded the room to reveal an astonishing sight.

They were standing on the edge of a huge chessboard, behind the black chessmen, which were all taller than they were and carved from what looked like black stone. Facing them, way across the chamber, were the white pieces.

"Don't tell me we have to play a game of chess?" Neville said.

"Hell no we don't," Harry marched onto the chess platform and pointed it at the first pawn to get into his sights. "Reducto!" What soon followed was Harry blowing every single chess piece sky high with a flurry of destructive spells. The pieces moved into action, scrambling away and doing their utmost not get hit, but the raven haired youth would have none of it. Pretty soon all of the chess pieces were blown to pieces.

"W-wow," said Neville as the entire white chess pieces were destroyed, Hermione just gaped at the destruction her friend had heaped upon the chess pieces.

"There," Harry said decisively, "no more chess."

The three walked over to the door on the other side of the chess board and opened it, entering a passageway that they began to speed through. At the end of the tunnel was another door.

"All right." Harry whispered. "Time to go in," Harry pushed it open.

A disgusting smell filled their nostrils, making the three cringe. Though they had no time to do anything else. For as soon as they entered, the troll that had been in the room spotted them. It grabbed its club and let out a loud roar before charging them.

"Scatter!" shouted Harry as the three of them ran off in opposite directions. Whether by instinct or him just being the first person it spotted, the troll charged at Neville, who was petrified with fear.

"Reducto!" The Troll roared out in anger and a bit of pain as it was struck in the back with a blasting curse. It spun around and quickly laid eyes on Harry, who had his wand out and was pointing it directly at him. Roaring again the creature charged towards him, its clumsy footsteps making the earth shake with each thump of its large feet. This one was much larger than the Troll Harry had faced previously, where that one had been around fifteen feet, this one looked to be about twenty, maybe even twenty-five feet tall.

Harry narrowed his eyes as he waited for the troll to get in close, when it was fifteen feet away he sent another reductor curse at it. This time the curse hit the club, literally disintegrating it due to the amount of power Harry had put behind the spell. While the Troll roared as it was showered in finely grained chips of wood that were no bigger than a grain of sand, Harry smirked.

One of the many things he had done after getting out of the hospital was to look up information on more powerful spells. He had discovered that the attack he had used during his battle with the Troll that had discovered him and Hermione was actually a spell. The Reductor Curse, a spell used to blast solid objects to pieces. Thanks to the knowledge he had found on the curse, he no longer had to take direct control of his magic to use it, thus the amount of magic required to cast it was greatly lessened.

Another thing he had done was look up information on trolls. Trolls were a magical creature of prodigious strength and immense stupidity. They generally reached a height of anywhere from twelve to twenty-five feet and weigh up to nearly a ton. They were dangerously violent and incredibly aggressive. Originally Trolls originated in Scandinavia, but could now be found all across Europe. Trolls feed on raw flesh, and were not that fussy about what they ate, from animals to even humans.

There were three different kinds of Troll, Forest, Mountain, and River Trolls. The kind Harry was facing down right now was a Mountain Troll, the largest and most vicious species of Troll there was.

"Harry!" Hermione shouted as she raised her wand at the currently distracted Troll.

"Don't!" Shouted Harry, "Trolls are resistant to magic! All you'll be doing is earning its ire!"

Hermione looked at him. "But –"

"Don't worry," Harry said, keeping his wand on the large creature. "I've got this." A roar from the Troll alerted Harry to the fact that it had recovered and was now charging at him. Harry took a deep breath as he waited, wand raised and ready to fire off a spell that he had learned for just such an occasion. One of the few things he had not learned in the books he read, but rather in the battle he had with that first Troll, was that while they may be magically resistant, there were several weaknesses that could be exploited.

For example, they were weak against getting stabbed in the eye by sharp, pointy objects.

"Silex Silicus!" shouted Harry just as the large Troll opened its mouth to let loose another roar. A spear appeared in midair, conjured from the spell Harry used, and launched itself at the Troll. Said creature had no time to even comprehend the danger it was in, much less dodge as the spear as it was impaled in the mouth, breaking through the tough hide on the back from its the fleshy inside of its throat. Gurgling noises issued from its mouth as blood poured out, it clutched at the spear as it stumbled. It fell back with a loud thud, its body going limp as it died.

Harry sighed and slumped to his knees for a second as he tried to regain his breath. That spell required a bit more magic than he had anticipated, though he knew from previous experimentation that part of it was thanks to the amount of magic he had used already, and another part due to the adrenaline that was just now leaving his system.



"Harry!" looking up he saw Hermione and Neville run over to him. "Are you alright?" asked the Bushy haired witch, her eyes showing just how worried she had been.

"Yes," Harry said, he reached into his robes, his left hand going into the potions belt at his waist. "Just a little tired," the hand emerged a second later with a small vial of pepper up potion, uncorking the top and downing it in one go. As he felt part of his magic being restored to him, Harry felt a small amount of satisfaction at his foresight. While he had not expected to be down here, facing trolls and other magical traps, he had realized from all of the troubles that had arisen this year that it would be wise to always be prepared. Thus he had made several potions that would help him regain lost energy and magic, though they would not restore his reserves completely, they were enough that he would be prepared for whatever lay ahead.

"Come on," Harry said as he stood up, "we should keep moving." The other two quickly moved to catch up as Harry opened the door on the far side of the room.

"Harry," Hermione said tentatively. When said raven haired boy looked at her she continued, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" asked Harry, tilting his head.

"For getting you involved in this," she said. "You had to fight another Troll because I was so insistent on dragging you here."

"No worries," Harry said, "none of this is your fault. Well," he smiled as he brought up a hand and pinched his fingers, "maybe a little, but don't worry too much."

"But –"

"Hermione," Harry cut her off as they reached the end of the hall and stopped in front of another door. "There is nothing for you to be sorry about, you didn't drag me here, I came on my own." Granted, he couldn't just let her go alone, so in a way it was her fault, but he wouldn't hold that against her. He gave Hermione a smile that caused her to smile as well. Opening the door the trio made their way into the next room.

What they found was a table with seven differently shaped bottles standing on it in a line.

"Snape's," said Harry. "wonder what task we have to perform now?" They stepped over the threshold, and immediately a fire sprang up behind them in the doorway. It wasn't ordinary fire either; it was purple. At the same instant, black flames shot up in the doorway leading onward.

They were trapped.

"Look!" Hermione seized a roll of paper lying next to the bottles. Harry looked over her shoulder to read it:

Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,  
Two of us will help you, which ever you would find,  
One among us seven will let you move ahead,  
Another will transport the drinker back instead,  
Two among our number hold only nettle wine,  
Three of us are killers, waiting bidden in line.

Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,  
To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:  
First, however slyly the poison tries to hide  
You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;  
Second, different are those who stand at either end,  
But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;  
Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,  
Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;  
Fourth, the second left and the second on the right  
Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.

"Great," Harry groaned, "a logic puzzle – how dull." He grabbed the smallest bottle and was about to drink when Hermione stopped him.

"Harry! What are you doing?"

"I was going to drink this potion and then walk through the fire," he said, as if it should be obvious. "Think about what the paper says and the answer becomes obvious."

Hermione frowned as she read the paper again, after her third read her eyes lit up. "Of course! Seven bottles: three are poison; two are wine; one will get us safely through the black fire, and one will get us back through the purple."

"Exactly," Harry said.

"Could someone please explain what's going on?" Neville asked.

"The smallest bottle is the potion that will get us through the fire," Hermione said.

Harry looked at the bottle. "There's only enough for one of us," he pointed out. "And I'm going to be the one going through."

"But Harry –"

"No, Hermione," Harry said sternly. "If Snape is the one attempting to steal the Sorcerer's Stone then neither of you will be a match for him. Out of all of us I'm the only one with enough combat experience to hold him off thanks to my training, and I know more spells than both of you combined."

"But I was the one who made you come with me!" she cried, looking ready to come to tears.

"We've already been through this, you didn't make me do anything," Harry argued calmly. "I came along myself, this was my choice, just like this is." Before either of them could say a word he drank the potion. "There, now I want both of you to go back, take the brooms and fly back up. I want one of you go to our dorm and get Hedwig to send a message to Professor Dumbledore, while the other goes to get McGonagall."

"But –"

"Now's not the time for arguing Hermione," he pointed out, "go, I'll see you two later."

Harry turned and dashed into the flames, he paid no heed to them as they licked his body, he couldn't feel them anyways. Finally, he was past the fire and in the chamber. However, Professor Snape was not the one who was there.

"Professor Quirrel," Harry said with a blank look. "Well I would almost say this was a surprise, but then, I would be lying."

The Defense Professor smiled. "Oh, so you suspected me then?" he asked, there was no stutter in his voice.

"Of course," said Harry, "Hermione suspected Snape, but I felt something was off with that. Of course, it was hard to figure out, I kept getting the same feeling of someone trying to use ligilimency in both of your classes. Snape's eventually stopped when he couldn't get passed my shields, yours didn't. Then there was that time you jinxed my broom, Hermione was so sure Snape had done it, but he was too likely a suspect, everyone would have suspected him, except a Slytherin of course."

"Of course, the clincher was your test to get past the chamber," continued Harry. "Trolls, a troll was let loose during Halloween and you passed out from what I hear, yet your test was to get passed a troll. Curious, isn't it?"

"Very good, Potter," he said with a sardonic smile. "You have quite the talent, I have to admit you have impressed me all year with your talent for magic."

"Normally I'd take that as a compliment," said Harry. "But considering who you work for...I had a run in with your master you know, drinking unicorn blood."

"I believe that's enough talk Potter," said Quirrel, narrowing his eyes as he snapped his fingers. Ropes sprang out of thin air and attempted to wrap around Harry.

But he was ready, with a flick of his wrist his wand was out. "Diffindo!" he slashed at the ropes and dodged the one he couldn't hit.

"Very good, Potter," Professor Quirrel said. "You have talent for one so young, but it would have been better if you'd just let me capture you." He flicked out his own wand and sent a powerful spell that Harry couldn't identify.

He dodged and sent his own curse at the traitorous Professor, "Stupefy!"

Professor Quirrel set up a shield to take the impact before sending another spell at Harry. "You can't win, Potter!"

"Don't tell me what I can and can't do!" Harry shouted back, he aimed his wand again, "Diffindo!"

The two continued trading spells back and forth, Harry knew almost as soon as the battle started that he was at a serious disadvantage. Professor Quirrel was more experienced than he was, had more spells than he did and those spells were more powerful than his were. The fact that he cast silently was just the icing on the proverbial shit cake.

This did not mean that Harry was going to be giving up anytime soon, he used his Seeker reflexes and dodged the spells that were sent his way. He had tried to block one, but it had not turned out well as he found out when one single curse broke through his shield like it wasn't even there. Instead he spent his effort in dodging and presenting a constantly moving target, taking small opportunities to send curses back at the turban wearing Professor.

"You're not bad, Potter!" Quirrel laughed, "But your no match for me." he sent another curse at Harry that he quickly dodged, he didn't even realize it was a faint until it was too late and Harry suddenly found himself on the floor, bound by ropes.

"Now, be a good boy and stay there while I look at this mirror," he said, turning back to the Mirror of Erised.

"This mirror is the key to finding the Stone," Quirrell murmured, tapping his way around the frame. "Trust Dumbledore to come up with something like this... but he's in London... I'll be far away by the time he gets back..."

Harry growled as he tried to struggle against his bindings.

"Don't bother trying to break free," said Quirrel as he moved around the mirror, looking at the back. "Those are magically enhanced ropes, they won't break so easily." Quirrell came back out from behind the mirror and stared hungrily into it. "I see the Stone... I'm presenting it to my master... but where is it."

"You know, I'm curious," said Harry, "why Voldemort isn't here with you. After all, he is the one who is after the stone." He wasn't very hopeful at the moment, but wanted the man to keep talking just in

case he managed to find a way to break free. Maybe he could learn something useful while he was at it.

"Oh, he is with me," Quirrel said quietly, "he is always with me. I met him when I traveled around the world. A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it... Since then, I have served him faithfully, although I have let him down many times. He has had to be very hard on me." Quirrell shivered suddenly. "He does not forgive mistakes easily. When I failed to steal the stone from Gringotts, he was most displeased. He punished me... decided he would have to keep a closer watch on me..." Quirrell's voice trailed away.

Harry frowned to himself, what did Quirrel mean when he said his master was always with him? His mind went through what he knew of possible ways this could be but came up blank, he wished he had thought to read about possible answers to this question, but like they say hind-sight is twenty-twenty.

Quirrell cursed under his breath.

"I don't understand... is the Stone inside the mirror. Should I break it. What does this mirror do. How does it work. Help me, Master!"

"Use the boy... Use the boy..." Harry stiffened as he heard a voice that was oh so familiar to him, his memories, his nightmares, it sounded weaker than before but there was no mistaking it. It was Voldemort's voice, but where was he?

Quirrell rounded on Harry. "Yes – Potter – come here." He clapped his hands once, and the ropes binding Harry fell off.

Harry stood up wearily as he tried to decide what to do. He couldn't fight Quirrel, not straight on at least, best to listen to the man until he could think of what to do.

"Come here," Quirrell repeated. "Look in the mirror and tell me what you see." Harry walked toward him.

Quirrell moved close behind him. Harry breathed in the funny smell that seemed to come from Quirrell's turban. He closed his eyes, stepped in front of the mirror, and opened them again.

Harry saw himself, saw what he had seen the first time he had looked at the mirror. Himself as an adult with a woman, she was holding a baby with black hair and green eyes, the woman had no face, because there was no female he was thinking about in this particular instance. It wasn't who the person was, it was what she represented that mattered. A family.

Behind Harry were his parents, his mother was smiling at him, her green eyes looking so much like his own, his father had a hand on his shoulder, that mischievous grin he was so well known for on his face as he looked between Harry and the faceless woman, it seemed as if he was saying 'good job son'.

This time there were more people though, he could see his friends, Neville and Hermione, Susan and Hannah, Lisa, Terry and Padma and Tracey, Daphne and Blaise all standing with him. This past year had been one of the best in his life, these people had become a part of his extended family.

He also saw Lisa, his muggle friend, wearing that same kind smile she usually did.

"Well." said Quirrell impatiently. "What do you see?"

In that moment a plan formed in Harry's mind. It was a reckless plan, insane on so many levels that it was unlikely to work. It was also the only thing he could think to do, and he would likely die anyways if he did nothing.

"I see myself," he said, "kicking your arse!" Harry spun on a dime and jumped in the air, performing a spinning kick that smashed right into Quirrel's face. Harry smiled in grim satisfaction as he heard the crack of the man's nose, and the yelp that followed as he was sent flying onto the ground. Harry jumped away from the mirror and flicked out his wand, aiming it at the mirror.

"Reducto!"

"No!" Screamed Quirrel as the mirror was blown to pieces.

"KILL HIM!" roared a voice and Harry suddenly realized it was coming from underneath the turban.

"Accio, Quirrel's wand!" the wand that had landed on the ground when Harry had kicked Quirrel soared into his hand, slapping his palm. Harry grinned as he snapped the wand in half, watching the look of rage on Quirrel's face with a smirk, "oops."

"Damn you, Potter!" Quirrel started towards him when a voice spoke up.

"Let me speak to him...face to face."

"Master, you are not strong enough!"

"I have strength enough... for this..."

Harry watched as Quirrell reached up and began to unwrap his turban. He kept his breathing controlled, knowing this would not be very pretty, not if he was going to face who he thought he was. The turban fell away. Quirrell's head looked strangely small without it. Then he turned slowly on the spot.

Where there should have been a back to Quirrell's head, there was a face, a face he knew well, not that Voldemort would know that. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake.

"Harry Potter..." it whispered.

"Voldemort," Harry said calmly as he faced the man who had taken his parents. "Fancy meeting you here, it's been what? Eleven years?"

The face gave a hissing laugh, "you have just as much cheek as your father, Potter. He was quite brave...even as I killed him...he had that same defiant look...that you do now."

"So, I would have never guessed that you were actually inhabiting another's body," Harry said conversationally. Voldemort was trying to bait him, work him into a rage so that he would make a mistake. It would have worked if Harry hadn't learned to keep himself calm



under most situations, especially since he could feel the anger radiating inside of him as this monster mentioned his father.

"Yes...it is most unfortunate, isn't it?" Voldemort said. "I am but mere shadow and vapor ... I have form only when I can share another's body... but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds... Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past weeks... you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the forest..."

"I have to admit...I am rather angry...at how you have just ruined my chance of getting a body...still...I cannot help but admire...your spirit..." he paused, "join me...Harry...I have watched you this year...you have the potential to be great...I can help you...I can make you so strong...that even Dumbledore will cower at your feet...together...we can rule the world..."

"Hahahaha!" Harry laughed, he couldn't help it, it was so absurd that this man thought he could be swayed like this. "I have read history Voldemort, loads of history and there have been many like you. They pour sweet words into the ears of others, convince them they can become powerful if they would but follow you. But I know, I know that people like you, people who covet power above all else, never share it."

Voldemort's face gained a look of rage. "Fine! Then you can die! Kill him!"

"Don't move Quirrell!" Harry warned, his wand pointing at the man – snake-man – whatever, Quirrelmort. "You make one move and I'll blast you and your master's head off!"

"I think not," Quirrelmort said as he pulled a second wand from his robes. Harry swore as he wove around a spell, he should have just blasted the bastard and been done with it!

The previous battle now continued and Harry was doing all he could not to get hit by the powerful curses. He knew he wouldn't last, he needed to act soon or else he'd be dead. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw the mirror shards scattered across the floor and flicked his wand towards them as he dodged another attack. "Winagardium Leviosa!"

The mirror shards all floated into the air, quivering before they pointed themselves at Quirrelmort. They shot towards him but the man merely waved his wand and vanished them all. Fortunately it was all the time Harry needed as he sent a reducto curse at the man's feet. However, Quirrelmort seemed to realize what his strategy was and put up a shield far enough away from him that the reducto curse hit it.

"You can't beat me like that!" he shouted as he sent more spells. Harry growled, he needed to get in close, the man had the advantage at long range, but Harry would bet he had no hand to hand combat experience.

"Fine then!" Harry shouted as he dodged two more spells, then stopped on a dime just in time to dodge one that had been sent to where he was going. "Reducto!" he pointed his wand at the ceiling over Quirrelmort's head, blasting large chunks off the ceiling and sending it falling towards Quirrel.

The man quickly destroyed it with a well-placed reducto of his own. "That won't work!" he shouted as he turned his wand back on Harry.

Or at least where Harry was.

"Then how about this!" came a voice from above.

"What!" Quirrel looked up just in time to see Harry's dragon-hide boots implant themselves upon his face. The man was smashed into the ground and Harry grabbed onto the wrist that had the hand holding his wand.

"AAHHH!" Quirrel screamed as both he and Harry felt an intense burning. To Harry, it was as if a thousand needles were trying to make their way into his forehead. It was painful, easily one of the most painful things he had ever experienced in his life, worse even than one of Master Wei's beatings and that was really saying something.

Harry rolled off the man and tried to blink the blurriness from his eyes. He then watched as Quirrelmort's hands turned to ash.

"What is this!" Shouted Quirrelmort, "Master! What's happening!"

"Fool! Kill him!" screamed Voldemort.

Harry watched Quirrelmort try to get back up and ran towards him, jumping in the air and flipping his body around as he stuck out a leg that smashed into Quirrelmort's face again. The man stumbled back and Harry came in again. This time, Harry's hands grabbed onto the man's face.

"AAAAHHHHH!"

Harry ignored the burning pain in his scar, he pushed past the pain, through it and kept a tight hold. He tried his best to block out the pained shrieks that Quirrelmort was emitting, the man's face was literally crumbling, he saw it turning into ash, burning away. Soon, the man's head was gone entirely, turned to dust that blew away and his body stopped moving entirely, then that too, was burnt away.

Harry slumped to the floor, shaking as the adrenaline left his system. The pain in his scar was still there, though it was fading – along with his vision. He got one last look at the room before darkness engulfed him.

XoX

So I'm beginning to realize what people are talking about when they mention cliché's. I've read a few more Harry Potter stories and have to admit, some of them have so many bad cliché's its not even funny. A cliché is something that is used over and over again in multiple stories because it works. However that only holds true if the writer can make it work in the story. Things like having Harry get a custom made wand with multiple cores and woods, being the heir to all four founders of Hogwarts and Merlin himself, being in 16 + different marriage contracts that he HAS to fulfill or his magic will kill him, having the goblins enact some kind of ancient ritual to see what powers he has, said powers being utterly ridiculous and unheard of, and in all likelihood being abilities Harry will never use, and last but not least, coming to Hogwarts and being given his own house, which would be called House Emyrs or some such. These are the biggest Cliché's I have found in stories so far, and I think the biggest problem people have with them is that there is really no reason to give Harry all of this other than people wanting to show how Powerful and awesome Harry is. I mean, my god, why the hell does Harry need to be a metamorph with multiple animagus

transformations, Dragon Magic (What ever the hell that is), battle magic and whatever other powers he has? When using a cliché it has to have a reason and be tied intimately into the story.

For those of you who actually read this small rant, rest assured, everything I have written so far actually HAS a VERY GOOD reason for being in my story. I did go back and change one thing when Harry went to Diagon Alley, and that was getting rid of his Peverelle Heritage. In the canon, the Peverelle brothers were the holders of the Deathly Hallows. Because I have never liked the Deathly Hallows, since I felt it was essentially giving Harry this Ultimate power against death to beat Voldemort, and I feel he should be given a chance to become Voldemorts equal without being the 'master of death', I have taken out the Hallows. In my story, they do not exist. So there really isn't a point in having Harry be a Peverelle, so I took that out. Everything else has a reason. Harry having multiple wand cores and wood types HAS a reason for being in this, his dual animagi form HAS a reason for being in this story, him being related to Godric Gryffindor HAS a reason for being in this story, even me putting him in Gryffindor and not one of the other houses HAS a reason for being in this story. While I do not have everything planned out, certain bits of information, including the things I have mentioned above, are very intimately tied into the story and will be important later on.

Now, I would like to thank all those who read this rant for reading it, and all those who read this chapter for reading that too. I hope you enjoyed it, there is one more chapter before I end Harry's first year at Hogwarts. I think you'll be surprised by my last chapter.

## Chapter 14: Back to Private Drive

XoX

The moment Harry opened his eyes all he could see were blurry figures that immediately gave him a headache, so he quickly shut them again. He may want to know where he was but didn't want to have to deal with splitting pain it would be bringing to his cranium.

His scar was still tingling, a testament and reminder to what happened in the room with the Mirror of Erised. Not that he needed a reminder. Harry still shivered as he remembered what had happened, his battle with Quirrel, how touching the man had burned him, how he had killed him.

That was his biggest issue right there that he was going to have to deal with, he had killed a man. Having killed a troll made him feel bad enough, but now he had actually killed another human being, even if that human had the most evil and vile dark lord of the century inhabiting his body like a parasite, it still didn't bring him any comfort. Harry suspected he was going to have a long talk with his Sifu over this summer.

Feeling a little more bold he cracked his eyes open again, the world was still fuzzy but it was getting better. Harry quickly dug into his magical core, it was a little weak due to how much magic he had used against Quirrelmort, but what he wanted to do shouldn't take too much. He began channeling it to his eyes, and sighed in relief when the world became a little clearer.

He could now tell that he was in the Hospital Wing, remembering it from his last visit when he had faced the troll. He absently wondered who had brought him here when a voice interrupted his musings.

"Good afternoon, Harry."

Harry turned to see the smiling face of Albus Dumbledore.

"Professor Dumbledore, how did I get here?" he asked, it probably wasn't the best first question he could have asked, but he wasn't really sure what questions he wanted answered first and needed some time to sort out everything in his mind.

"Ah. One Neville Longbottom had gone to Professor McGonagall and she managed to find you," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling merrily.

"I see," Harry said, he looked over next to Dumbledore and saw several large tables with what looked like an entire candy store on them. He could see every type of Wizard candy imaginable.

"You seem to have made quite a few friends, Harry. Nearly the entire school pitched in and brought you these treats," said Dumbledore, beaming. "What happened down in the dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a complete secret, so, naturally, the whole school knows. I believe your friends Misters Fred and George Weasley were responsible for trying to send you a toilet seat. No doubt they thought it would amuse you. Madam Pomfrey, however, felt it might not be very hygienic, and confiscated it."

Harry nodded absently as he looked at all of the candy and get well soon cards, he looked up and blinked when he saw a large banner hanging from the ceiling that said 'Get Well Soon, Harry!' in large, bold print. It looked like it was animated as the words kept changing color between all four house colors.

"Young Miss Granger charmed that, I believe," Dumbledore said as he noticed where Harry's eyes went. "She is very talented for her age," a twinkle appeared in the man's eyes from behind his half-moon spectacles, "though, from reports she is not quite as talented as you."

"That's kind of you to say, sir," he said, truthfully he knew Hermione was far more dedicated to her studies than even he was. It was only thanks to the fact that he had been using magic since he was one, consciously using it since he was six, and had the ability to remember everything that had happened in his life since birth that he was better than Hermione. If he did not have those abilities, he had no doubt in his mind she would be at the top of his class, not him.

Shifting to sit up to get more comfortable he looked at Dumbledore and asked, "so how long have I been out?"

"About three days," said Dumbledore, smiling a grandfatherly smile. "Your friends have been quite worried for you, in fact Madam Pomfrey has had trouble trying to keep your friends away, she has had to kick them out at least two dozen times."

That brought a smile to Harry's face, while he had always had Lisa and her mother doting on him when ever he got injured playing football. The knowledge that his friends cared about him so much warmed his heart. "So what happened to the Stone?" he asked, his mind turning to the more serious matter.

"Ah. Well, it seems when the mirror was destroyed, the Stone was lost as well," said Dumbledore.

"I see," Harry said, "I'm sorry, that would be my fault. I didn't want Voldemort to get the Stone so I destroyed the mirror."

"That is quite alright, Harry," Dumbledore replied, smiling lightly. "I had a long talk with Nicholas and we both agreed that this was for the best. They have enough Elixir stored to set their affairs in order before they pass on."

"So what happened to Voldemort?" asked Harry.

"Ah. It seems that, by the time McGonagall had gotten there, he had already fled." Dumbledore answered, "He left Quirrell to die; he shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies. Nevertheless, Harry, while you may only have delayed his return to power, it will merely take someone else who is prepared to fight what seems a losing battle next time – and if he is delayed again, and again, why, he may never return to power."

So Dumbledore assumed Voldemort had killed Quirrell, it was a bit of a surprise that the headmaster did not know what really happened, but Harry supposed even he could not know everything that went on in the castle. There were no portraits near the Stone after all.

"Sir, I have a question," Harry said carefully.

"Ask away and I shall do my best to answer," said Dumbledore.

Harry nodded as a stern expression crossed his face, "what the bloody hell were you thinking, bringing the Philosopher's Stone to Hogwarts!"

"Excuse me?" asked a confused and, judging by the raised to the hairline eyebrows, shocked Dumbledore.

"You heard me!" Harry growled, "bringing such a powerful magic item that you knew someone was after into a school for children! What possessed you to do something so stupid! Do you know how much danger you put the students in! What would have happened if Hermione hadn't had the misfortune to be picked on by Ron right before the troll incident! Did you even think about that! Had she not been crying the girls bathroom, I would have never gone after the troll and some other student might have had the misfortune of running into it and getting killed!"

"Harry –" Dumbledore tried to get a word in but Harry was on a roll and not about to stop now. Not until he said his peace.

"And then I find out that Voldemort, the most evil and powerful dark lord in a century is not only alive – attached to the back of your defense Professors head I might add – but also trying to get the Stone for himself!" By now Madam Pomfrey had barged in at hearing the shouts, she looked at the scene, gaping as Harry verbally tore into the headmaster. "You put the students at risk, when it's supposed to be your job to ensure a safe learning environment! That was most irresponsible, reckless, foolhardy and damnably stupid move ever!"

Finally, feeling spent, Harry slumped back onto the bed, breathing a little heavily from having given such a verbal lashing so soon after waking up.

Dumbledore stared at Harry for nearly two full minutes, shock evident on his features. Never, in his entire life had he received such a long tirade about his one of his failures, especially not by a student. Finally, after blinking stupidly at Harry for several seconds, Dumbledore began to chuckle.

"I believe that is the first time that a student has ever scolded me," he admitted.



Harry felt mildly embarrassed, not at scolding the headmaster, he had pointed out the faults in his teachers in muggle school without caring about the consequences. But that he had lost control of his emotions and ranted like that. "Sorry about that," he apologized.

"No, no, you are quite right," Dumbledore sighed. "When Nicholas asked me to look after the Stone I was unsure what to do with it, at first, I had placed it in one of my vaults in Gringotts'. However, as you may have heard someone attempted to steal it, I was lucky enough to get it out of their in time to keep it safe, but I had nowhere else to put it. I felt that Hogwarts would be the safest place, I could have the teachers help place enchantments around it and I would be there to keep an eye on it as well." He paused before adding, "obviously, it wasn't as well protected as I had hoped."

Harry frowned but didn't comment on Dumbledore's words, instead, opting to change the subject by asking, "do you know why Quirrel couldn't touch me?"

"I do have a theory about that," Dumbledore said. "Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good."

Harry found himself having a hard time believing that it was just love that managed to protect him from Voldemort. How many other mothers had been in the same position his had before Voldemort came after him? How many had sacrificed themselves? How many had failed? Surely, Lily wasn't the first to be in that position. It had to be something else, something to do with the prophecy he had heard his father talk about one time.

He thought about asking Dumbledore if he knew about the prophecy, but he didn't want to have the man asking him questions on how he could know about something like that if he did.

"You were the one who sent me the invisibility cloak, weren't you?" asked Harry, figuring it was a safer topic.

"Yes, I am," replied Dumbledore, "your father happened to leave it in my possession, and I thought you might like it." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Useful things... your father used it mainly for sneaking off to the kitchens to steal food when he was here."

"Now, enough questions. I suggest you make a start on these sweets. Ah! Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans! I was unfortunate enough in my youth to come across a vomit flavored one, and since then I'm afraid I've rather lost my liking for them – but I think I'll be safe with a nice toffee, don't you." He smiled and popped the golden-brown bean into his mouth. Then he choked and said, "Alas! Ear wax!"

"I am sorry, but you will all have to wait to see him!" both Harry and Dumbledore turned at the sound of madam Pomfrey speaking through a crack in the door that led to the hallway.

Another voice spoke up after that, one Harry knew well, "is he not awake yet?"

"He is, but Mr. Potter needs his rest!"

"Oh come on, don't be such an old prune!" came the voice of Tracey Davis.

"Why, I never! You'll all have to wait!"

Harry sighed as he swung his legs over the bed and hopped off.

"Ah. Harry I don't think it's the best thing to be moving right now," Dumbledore said, his voice sounding a little worried.

"I'm fine," Harry waved the man's concern off and frowned as he noticed he was in nothing more than a pair boxers. He looked at the small bed stand next to his bed and saw his wand, grabbing it he waved it at the pillow he had been resting on and transfigured it into a pair of pants and the sheets into a shirt.

"Extraordinary use of magic," Dumbledore marveled as Harry put his new clothes on. He had never seen one so young use magic so easily, the headmaster had read the reports of course. But seeing it was entirely different than hearing about it second hand.

"Thank you," Harry sniffed his clothes and grimaced, they smelled like he had been wearing them for two days. Another wave of his wand and he cast a freshening charm on them. Feeling confident that he didn't reek of two days without a shower now, he walked towards where Madam Pomfrey was still arguing with his friends.

"I'd like to see my friends, if you don't mind," he said, startling the Medi-witch and his friends.

"Harry!" Hermione shouted as she rushed past the still surprised Pomfrey and latched onto him in a bone-crushing hug. That seemed to be the cue everyone else was looking for as they simply pushed the poor Medi-witch aside and surrounded Harry. Soon enough they were asking him all kinds of questions in a rapid fire pace.

"How are you?"

"Are you alright?"

"Is it true that you killed Professor Quirrell?"

"What happened?"

"Why didn't you take us with you?"

"One at a time! I can only answer one question at a time!" Harry said over the cacophony of voices. They quickly quieted down and Harry continued, "I'll answer all of your questions, now why don't we go back to where I was sleeping, I'm still sore and tired."

"Professor Dumbledore, make these kids get out!" Madam Pomfrey said as Harry sat back down on his bed with the others pulling up chairs around him. "Harry needs his rest!"

"I do apologize Poppy," Albus said with a twinkle in his eyes. "But I don't think you're going to be winning this one today, best to just let Harry be with his friends."

"But he needs more rest," Madam Pomfrey argued.

"He can get plenty of rest later," Dumbledore assured, "however, he seems to be in good health right now and I believe his friends will

help him more than rest can." Madam Pomfrye just huffed, but was forced to let the group stay. She and Dumbledore soon left, with her mumbling about how her hospital was turning into a barn.

Harry spent the next hour explaining all that had happened that landed him in the hospital, from the knowledge that the Philosopher's Stone was hidden at Hogawrts, to how Hermione had found out that the Stone was in danger of being stolen, his, Hermione and Neville's adventure to get the stone and finally, his battle with Voldemort.

"So your saying that You-Know-Who is not only alive but was possessing our defense teacher so he could steal the Philospher's Stone and gain his body back?" Tracey asked with more than a little shock and fear.

"That about sums it up," said Harry. He had not really wanted to let anyone know that Voldemort was alive and kicking, but there wasn't much he could do to cover the facts since half the school at least had an idea of what happened. And he felt his friends deserved to know, if for no other reason so that they could prepare for when the Dark Lord decided to strike again.

"B-but I thought he was dead!"

"So did everyone else," Harry pointed out, "but I guess he's not as dead as we had hoped. Still, he seems to need to possess a body to actually get anywhere so he won't be coming back, for now at least."

"I should tell Auntie about this," Susan said, "if You-Know-Who really is alive than we need to inform the Ministry."

"Do you really think they would believe me?" asked Harry. "Even with my fame I doubt anyone would believe that Voldemort (everyone in the room flinched) is really alive."

"But if he really is alive –"

"I'm not saying don't inform your aunt," Harry said softly. "I'm just saying that I don't think the Ministry should know, not unless we can bring solid proof of Voldemort's return."

"Why do say that?" Daphne asked quietly, she looked slightly pale and was likely just as afraid as the others to know that Voldemort was still alive.

Harry sighed as he leaned back on his bed and said, "as a species, humans have adopted something of an out of sight out of mind philosophy, what this means is that essentially, if they don't see it, it doesn't exist. Add onto the fact that Voldemort caused the entirety of wizarding Britain to bow down in fear and you can see why no one would want to believe that he might not be dead."

"That's a very bleak way of looking at the world," Hermione said.

"That's the human psyche for you," Harry shot back with a shrug.

"So then what should we do?" asked Susan, her voice soft and quivering a bit. "I mean, if we can't inform the Ministry..."

Harry sighed, "for now at least, don't tell anyone what I told you. When I get solid proof that he's returned I'll have you schedule a meeting with your aunt and we can discuss things at length then." Susan took a moment to think about his request before nodding her head. Harry looked around at the other's, "can I ask all of you to do the same?" When they nodded he leaned back, "right now we don't have many options. Announcing the Dark Lord isn't as dead as we believe without solid proof will cause a lot of instability within the government."

"And Minister Fudge would likely begin a smear campaign against you," Blaise added. When some of the other's looked at him the dark-skinned boy continued, "Lucius Malfoy has the Ministers ear, and we all know he's a Death Eater, if he learned that You-Know-Who was alive he would no doubt do everything in his power to destroy Harry's credibility, likely by claiming you were unstable."

"And then Malfoy would try to find Voldemort himself," Harry finished. "Which would be bad, right now Voldemort is weak, he has to inhabit the body of others too survive and his followers are in hiding. Once knowledge of his survival becomes known, they will seek him out while the rest of wizarding Britain buries their head in the sand."

"So for the moment there is nothing we can do?" asked Lisa with some trepidation in her voice. The Turpin family, while not an

Ancient and Noble house, or even just a noble house, was still a fairly old pure-blood family. Like many houses they had been reduced to less than half of their original members during the last war against Voldemort. Lisa's Grandparents, several aunts and uncles he been killed during some of the raids the Dark Lords Death Eaters had gone on. The thought of his possible return was anything but pleasant for her.

"Not nothing, there are some things we can do," Harry corrected. Everyone looked at him so he explained by saying, "we can prepare, we can train and learn new spells, train our minds and bodies for the day he tries to return again. It's the only thing we can do right now, but it's better than nothing." All of his friends nodded solemnly, acknowledging that was he said was correct and there really wasn't much else they could do.

"Harry!" the doors burst open and everyone watched as Tonks ran in, rushing towards his bed only to trip the rest of the way and fall right into his lap.

"Tonks, as always your entrance is outstanding," Harry said with a grin as Tonks pushed her torso off his lap and looked at him with an embarrassed grin.

"Sorry," she apologized.

"That's alright," Harry waved off her apology, "though I am curious as to why your still here? I thought you would have left by now." Most of the other graduates had already left, except for the few orphans whose parents had died in the war.

"I got into auror training," Tonks said with a large grin. "So I don't have anything to do, unlike people who end up getting normal jobs at the Ministry or something. Besides," she added, her grin growing larger, "I wanted to stick around until you lot left."

"Congratulations."

"Thanks! So what happened? Is it true? Did you really kill Professor Quirrell?" she asked in a excited voice.

Harry sighed before he began to explain what had happened with Quirrell, again. They in turn told Harry all he had missed in his two

days of absence, the only thing of real interest was that he had missed the last Quidditch match and Slytherin had won the cup because of that. It was a bit depressing and he was sure Oliver would be upset, but since there wasn't much he could do about that he put it out of his mind and just enjoyed talking with his friends until Madame Pmfrey kicked them out again.

XoX

The next day Harry was allowed out of the hospital and once again was subject to the same awed whispering he had been subject to every time he did something others would consider amazing. Though, he was unsure whether or not the rumor, even if it was the truth, about him killing Professor Quirrell really constituted as cool.

Still, most of the student population was, as always, content to merely stare at him as he passed, then whisper about him behind his back. Harry really didn't understand why people couldn't just come up and ask him their questions, I mean, sure, he wasn't going to tell them the story he had told his friends, but it wasn't like he wouldn't just turn them away. It was well known around the school that Harry was a friendly person, willing to help if you asked and open so long as you kept your questions from being too personal.

Eventually Harry reached a corridor that no one else was wandering around in and stopped in front of a door. Opening it he walked in and found Tonks already waiting for him.

"Wotcher, Harry," she said brightly.

"Hey Tonks," Harry took out his wand as he continued further in. "We going to get one more spar in before we all head home?"

"Yeah," Tonks sighed, suddenly sounding a little depressed. "You know, I'm going to miss these little get together's with you."

"I take it your shipping into the auror academy then?" asked Harry, smiling a bit. While he would miss Tonks as well he felt it would be good that she was leaving. He had not doubt she would become an auror and that would give him a possible informant within the auror forces in the future.

Tonks nodded, "I'm heading out to the academy two weeks from now, we likely won't see each other for another two years at least."

Harry grinned, "but that doesn't mean we won't still be able to talk will it? I mean, I can still owl you."

"That true," Tonks admitted with a smile.

"Hey, Tonks?"

"Yes?"

"Before we begin, I was just wondering, if – well," Harry looked a little embarrassed as he trailed off.

"What?" asked Tonks.

"I wanted to see what you really look like," Harry said in a rush.

The request seemed to leave Tonks flatfooted as she stared at the young boy before her. "You want to see what I really look like?" Tonks asked slowly, as if she hadn't heard him right.

"Yes," Harry said, "I figured out why you always seem so clumsy and are tripping over everything, it's because your center of gravity is different from the body you've changed into."

Tonks blinked for a second as he explained this bit of theory on her well-known clumsiness, it was actually pretty sound considering that she had not been this clumsy until she took this form. She looked at Harry, seeing nothing more than an honest desire to see her, the real her.

"Alright," she said and before Harry's eyes she began to change, her body, which was already quite slender, became even more lithe and narrow, though her bust remained the same. Her pink hair became midnight black and the spike became long tresses that fell down to her mid-back. Her face also became more aristocratic, her cheek bones moved higher and her chin became a little narrower, the small dimple on her left cheek became softer, only visible if you were looking at it, while another one appeared on her right. When she opened her eyes Harry found himself staring at deep amethyst orbs.



Harry worked his mouth for several moments as he tried to think of something, anything to say. Finally, he said, "well, now I know why you have to hide this form."

"Why is that?" Tonks asked quietly, seemingly unsure of herself and nervous.

"Because if men saw you like that I doubt even hexing them with your most vicious curse would keep them off you," Harry said quite seriously. He was being completely honest, as a young boy of eleven, he really didn't care for romance, or love, or snogging, or any of the things girls began getting into at the same age, despite how mature he was for his age.

However, he was also much more comfortable around members of the opposite gender. His best friend of four years was a girl, and like all girls she loved girly things, particularly physical affection and receiving compliments. This friendship and the constant hugs, kisses on the cheek, and cuddling that Lisa loved so much had given Harry a different perspective on females than most males his age. He didn't really mind the girly things his female friends liked to do, even shopping was fun to him, he enjoyed physical forms of affection, though he would only allow it from his friends and Lisa's parents. The biggest difference between Harry and most boys his age, was that he could recognize the beauty in a woman, even if he couldn't see them in a romantic sense. He also knew when to compliment a woman on their beauty.

"What?" asked Tonks, her face turning red.

"Your beautiful," Harry told her bluntly, "like, really beautiful, and I'm not just saying that."

Tonks sputtered a bit as she tried to say something but the only thing that came out of her mouth that even resembled a word was something that sounded like "gurk". Harry laughed as Tonks tried to speak, of course, this served to make her angry at him, feeling like he was laughing at her, and she cast a stunner to teach him a lesson. Harry dove the side and retaliated with his own stunner, this time, it was completely silent.

"You can cast silently?" Tonks said, having finally gained her voice back as she sent several spells at him.

"Just the one," Harry replied as he dodged the spells by spinning left, then right and sent another stunner. "I still have a little trouble with the other spells for some reason." He had figured if he could get one down silently than the rest would follow like a set of dominoes that had been tipped. He was surprised when he found out that that wasn't the case, but then, each spell was different and would therefore require a different mindset and different visualizations to cast. That his working theory anyways.

"Well just keep practicing," Tonks said as she cast a flurry of stunners and disarming charms at him. "I expect a good match when we meet again."

"Ha! I'll give you a good match right now!" Harry shot back as he dodged and cast another stunner, then yelled out "Expelliarmus!"

The two were soon getting into their spar, a light sheen of sweat had appeared on both of them as they moved, dodged and blocked each others spells. For the most part they seemed evenly matched, Harry was faster, had better reflexes, and was more agile; while Tonks was older, more experienced, had a wider range of spells and could cast all of them silently.

Harry eventually cast off his robes to reveal black pants and a sleeveless white shirt while Tonks was in sweats.

"You really are getting good," Tonks admitted in a puff of breath as their spar paused after it hit the half an hour mark. "Before I use to be able to kick your buttocks in like, ten minutes."

"Buttocks?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow and a grin. "Is that the best insult you can give? Buttocks? Can't curse, Tonks?"

Tonks blushed, "Shush you!"

XoX

The next two days passed far too quickly for Harry's liking. He spent most of that time with his group of friends, either in the common room playing various games, or outside where they would have a large picnic.

"I can't believe we'll be going back home tomorrow," Susan said in a quiet voice as her nine friends plus Tonks lazed around by the Black Lake. They had just finished having a picnic that Harry had gotten the house elves to provide and were now laying down on an enlarged blanket, forming a circle with their bodies as their heads were set next to each others so they could all hear someone clearly when they spoke.

"I know what you mean," Tracey said as she stretched her arms above her head and into the air. "With all the excitement I get here it's going to be a shame to go back to my boring house."

"I know what you mean," Hannah said, "this year has been really fun. Despite some of the adventures people had without us," she cast a light glare at Harry.

"I said I was sorry," Harry said with a playful whine. "What more do you want from me?"

"To go on your next adventure," Hannah said.

"I'll see if I can't conjure another Dark Lord for us to face next year," Harry shot back.

"Well, I won't be going on any adventures with you guys," Tonks said with a sigh. "I'm leaving, kinda sucks that I only got to be here with you guys for this one year. It was fun watching you lot flip the school on its head."

"I blame Potter," Blaise said lazily. "After all, he's the one who instigated all of this."

"I think I'll take that as a compliment," said Harry.

As the group continued talking another voice spoke up, "Oi, there yeh are 'arry! Been lookin' for yeh!" The group sat up and looked over to see Hagrid walking over to them.

"Hey, Hagrid," Harry greeted with a wave. "You've been looking for me?"

"Aye, there's a friend who wants to see yeh," Hagrid told him. "She's waitin' nearby, just inside the forest." Harry looked at Hagrid for a

moment before he realized who, or more specifically, what, he was talking about.

"Thanks Hagrid, I'll go over there and say hi," he stood up and dusted himself off. "It would be nice to see her before I leave," he looked over at his friends and said, "I'll be back in a sec." The other's all watched him leave with Hagrid before turning to each other.

"I wonder who their talking about?" asked Lisa Turpin. "I don't know of anyone who would willingly go near that forest."

Tonks looked at the others with a mischievous grin. "Should we follow them?" she asked.

"I like the way you think, Tonks," Tracey said with a grin as she stood up.

XoX

Harry quickly followed Hagrid over to the edge of the forbidden forest near his hut, there he saw the unicorn he had saved step out from behind a tree. It walked over to him and gently nudged his hand.

"Well, hello to you too," Harry said as he began to run a hand over the light creature's mane. "What are you doing here, I wonder?"

"Firenze said 'e found her wanderin' the forest a few days ago," Hagrid explained. "She was headin' over this way, we were thinkin' she wanted to see yeh."

"Ah," Harry said, he looked into the unicorns eyes. "While I'm certainly pleased to see you, shouldn't you be with your family?" The unicorn looked at him for a moment before shaking her head, she moved away for a second and shook her tail, allowing several hairs to fall from it.

Harry blinked for a moment before asking, "are those for me?" When the unicorn nodded Harry moved over to them and reverently picked them up, Unicorn hairs were fairly rare, and he had never heard of a unicorn giving hairs away. He reached into his potions belt and grabbed a long thin vial, placing the hairs in it and casting an

unbreakable charm over it. He stood up a moment later and put his arms around the unicorn's neck, "thank you."

Several loud squealing sounds came from behind him and Harry turned to see his friends staring at him and the unicorn.

"Harry!" Hermione said excitedly, "is that what I think it is?"

"I don't know," Harry said casually, he noticed the unicorn looked scared and gently pet it, using a small amount of his magic to help calm the creature down. "What do you think she is?"

Hermione blushed at being corrected while Tonks took over, "is that a unicorn?"

"Yes, she is."

"C-can we pet her?" Susan asked shyly.

"I don't know, that's up to her," Harry said. He turned to look at the unicorn, "will you let them pet you?" the unicorn looked at him for several long moments before nodding its head.

"Ok, you can pet her, but you'll have to come up one at a time," Harry informed them. Susan, being the one who asked came up first, she very shyly stuck her hand out. The unicorn gently nudged her hand and Susan smiled as she began to pet it along its mane.

"She's so pretty," Susan whispered in awe.

"Well, she is a unicorn," Harry stated in a matter of fact kind of voice.

"Harry, do you know how rare it is for humans to see even one unicorn in their life?" she asked.

"Not really," Harry said, "I've read a little about them and know that they rarely show themselves to humans, because most aren't very pure. But that's about it."

"It's rare enough that most people never see one in their life," Susan said.

After everyone had come up and pet the unicorn it left and Hagrid asked Harry to stay behind. "I've got somethin' for yeh," he said, handing Harry what seemed to be a handsome, leather-covered book. Harry opened it curiously. It was full of wizard photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every page were his mother and father.

"Thanks, Hagrid," Harry choked out hoarsely as he wiped a stray tear from his eyes. He surprised the half-giant by giving him a big hug. While he had his memories of his family, they were tainted by his memories of their deaths. Having something else to remember them by meant a lot to him.

XoX

Later that night he sat himself down in the Great Hall for the end of the year feast, only Neville and Hermione were sitting with him tonight, the others were sitting with their house due to it being the last meal of the year.

The entire hall was done up in Gryffindor colors, their hour glass was far more full than all the other's. Before the feast started, Dumbledore stood up.

"Another year gone!" Dumbledore said cheerfully. "And I must trouble you with an old man's wheezing waffle before we sink our teeth into our delicious feast. What a year it has been! Hopefully your heads are all a little fuller than they were... you have the whole summer ahead to get them nice and empty before next year starts..."

"Now, as I understand it, the house cup here needs awarding, and the points stand thus: in fourth place we have Hufflepuff, with three hundred and fifty-two; Ravenclaw has four hundred and twenty-six; Slytherin, four hundred and seventy- two and in first place, we have Gryffindor with six hundred and twenty-five points."

There was loud cheering from all the tables, though the only cheering from Slytherin's was Tracey who was whistling loudly, much to the glares of many of her house mates.

"Now, I do not believe this will make much of a difference, considering the house is already in first place, but I have a few extra

points to give out, in light of recent events." Dumbledore paused for a moment, "For Mr. Longbottom and Miss Granger, I would like to award them each fifty points, for sticking with their friend through one of the hardest tasks that can be found." There was a loud cheering for Hermione and Neville, who both blushed bright red.

"And finally," Dumbledore said as the students quieted down. "For Mr. Potter, for showing talent that this hall has not seen in many years, I award, one hundred points."

As the houses cheered and crowed Harry looked over at Hermione and Neville before shrugging, the points were fairly useless, they had already finished in the lead but Harry had gotten the feeling that Dumbledore was trying to showcase him or something similar to that.

Later that night a big party was held in the common room for all the houses to celebrate the end of the year. Harry had managed to convince the house elves to bring them some butterbear and food, and he had played all kinds of muggle and wizarding games, conversed with members of each house, and spent time with his friends. It was easily the best party he had ever been in, the only thing that would have made it better was if his best friend Lisa was there.

XoX

Due to all the excitement Harry had almost forgotten about the exam results that were still to come, but come they did. It was no surprise to Harry when he had passed and been awarded the top student of his year, Hermione had gotten second place (She was still a little jealous but had come to realize that Harry really was deserving of his grades) while Padma and Daphne had tied for third, with Tracey just a little behind in fourth. The other's had all gotten grades that marked them from fifth to eleventh.

Before they knew it, their wardrobes were empty, their trunks were packed, Neville's toad was found lurking in a corner of the toilets; notes were handed out to all students, warning them not to use magic over the holidays ("I always hope they'll forget to give us these," said Fred Weasley sadly); Hagrid was there to take them down to the fleet of boats that sailed across the lake; and soon they were boarding the Hogwarts Express. Harry and his friends sat in their enlarged compartment, talking and laughing. They played

games of exploding snaps and muggle poker as the greenery of the countryside turned into muggle cities. They were soon dressed in jackets and coats, having changed from their robes as they pulled into platform nine and three-quarters at King's Cross station.

"Nymphadora!" a shout came from across the station.

"I told them never to call me that!" Tonks growled as she saw her mom and dad waving for her. The others snickered at her misfortune, getting a glare for their troubles.

"Looks like this is good bye for now, eh?" said Harry.

"Yeah," Tonks surprised him by pulling him into a tight hug, one where he was embarrassed to feel her bosom pressing against his face thanks to the way she had knocked him off balance and not given him time to recover. By the time she had pulled away he was beat red, causing her to laugh at him, "see you lot later!" she said as she rushed over to her parents, tripping over several people as she left.

"Mum, dad!" Padma shouted and waved as her parents came over, along with Pavarti who was still looking miffed at her sister becoming friends with Harry.

"There you are, dear," Mrs. Patil said, "these must be the friends you spoke of."

"Yes, this is Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, Harry Potter, Tracey Davis, Blaise Zabini, Daphne Greengrass, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbott and Lisa Turpin," she said, gesturing to each person as she spoke.

"That is quite an eclectic group," said Mr. Patil, eyeing odd mix of light and dark family children before his eyes landed on Harry. "Mr. Potter," he stuck his hand out, "my little girl has told me quite a bit about you. It seems that she has become quite smitten with you, especially after Christmas."

Harry grinned as Padma shouted "dad!" and took the proffered hand. "It's nice to meet you, sir," he said respectfully.



The two left with their daughters and soon after that Blaise, Neville and Tracey left as well. Blaise's mom had told Harry that she expected to see him over this summer and that her daughter was hoping to see him again. This caused a minor shiver to run through him but he promised to visit, and Tracey had nearly burned a whole through the woman with her eyes at the mention of Christine. Harry had promised to Owl Neville and send over some rare plants and herbology books if he found any. Hermione was next to leave, but having wanted to introduce Harry to her parents she had gone through the barrier and actually pulled the two with her.

Harry was actually surprised when she had come back, having thought the barrier would have prevented muggles from entering. Though he supposed having contact with Hermione could negate, or at least allow them to slip through the barrier. He absently wondered if he could someday study the magic that hid platform nine and three-quarters from the muggle world to test his theory.

"Dad, mum, this is Harry Potter, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbott, Daphne Greengrass and Lisa Turpin, some of the friends I've been telling you about," Hermione said by way of introduction.

"Ah, so we finally meet the famous Harry Potter," Christopher said as he looked at Harry. Christopher was a rather tall man, with brown hair, brown eyes and a decent build that showed he at least did some exercise. He looked a tad frazzled, likely from having his daughter drag him through a magical barrier he simply wasn't supposed to go through. "You know my daughter can't shut up about you?"

"Dad!" Hermione shouted with a scandalized look on her face.

"What? It's true, if you're not talking about school, you're talking about Harry Potter," he was stopped from saying anymore by Emma elbowing him in the ribs.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, all of you," she said with a bright smile as her eyes roamed over the faces. Emma Granger looked very much like what Harry figured Hermione would look like in a few years. Her hair was brown, with long curls that cascaded to mid-back. Her brown eyes held an inquisitive look about them, and Harry knew that she was where Hermione got her intellect from.

"You too ma'am," the group said together.

A little while later Hermione left and Hannah's parents picked up Susan and Hannah, Harry greeted them much the same way he did all the other parents he had met, which essentially consisted of him being respectful to her father while paying enough compliments to Mrs. Abbott that she was completely smitten with him. Of course, this also made Hannah completely red in the face with embarrassment as they left and her mom told her that Harry was a "keeper" whatever that was.

Lisa left a little after that, her parents were likely still at work and she had to take the Knight Bus with her sister to Diagon Alley.

"I'll see you two later," she said, leaving Harry and Daphne alone. They waited for a few minutes, just talking until Daphne's father came up.

"Daphne," her father said as he walked up to them, "time to go."

Daphne sighed before she turned to Harry who smiled at her, "I'll see you later, then?"

She nodded and flung herself on him, pulling him into a tight hug. "Don't forget to owl me," she whispered, her tone cracking just a tad.

"I'll do that and go one better," Harry replied, getting Daphne to pull back and look at him curiously. "We'll keep in touch, maybe we can plan a day for us and our friends to spend some time together in Diagon Alley," he explained.

Daphne smiled at him. "I'd like that," she told him before leaving.

With Harry now alone he found an area around King's Cross that was abandoned and silently apparated away. He reappeared within the Dursley household, right in front of the Dursley's as they were watching T.V. and startling them all so bad they nearly had a heart attack.

"BOY! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR DOING? USING YOUR FREAKISHNESS IN THIS HOUSE!" yelled Vernon as his face turned puce.

"You say that like I can't," said Harry, "or have you forgotten what I did to you before I left. I can do it again, if you'd like." At Vernon's paling face Harry grinned, "anyways, same rules as before, you leave me alone and I leave you alone."

He didn't give them a chance to speak as he walked upstairs and into his room. Harry looked around his room, it hadn't changed overly much, just a tad dustier, he doubted Petunia had even been in the room so it likely never got clean. He waved his mother's wand and all of the dust vanished, leaving a bright, shining surface.

A few seconds later Harry had pulled out his trunk, enlarged it, and set it at the foot of his bed. He opened it up to the compartment he had for artifacts and items that he found interesting, reaching in before he pulled out a small item the size of his hand covered in cloth. He unraveled the cloth to reveal a blood red stone that seemed to shine with an odd glow.

XoX

Harry's frown was extremely prominent right now as he studied the riddle that could only be Snapes. Ever since he had realized that Voldemort was the one after the Philosopher's Stone Harry knew he had to get it out of Hogwarts, or at the very least hidden. That was the soul reason he was down here in the first place.

Ever since the incident with the Unicorn he had been studying up on charms specifically designed to hide himself, scent deadening charms, aura hiding charms, charms that could temporarily hide ones magic so completely that even the most powerful detection runes wouldn't realize you were there. The spells were complicated, just casting them had drained him of nearly 2/3rds of his magic. But he knew that if he was going to take the stone out from under everyone's noses, he would need to do it with no one being the wiser.

He was sorely disappointed with the traps installed to protect the Stone, he recognized the teacher's handy-work with them; Professor Sprout with the Devil's Snare; Flitwick with the charmed keys, McGonagall's Chess set, the troll had to be from Defense, though that brought Quirrell's little fainting episode on Halloween into question and now Snape's logical riddle.

Fluffy wasn't even really worth mentioning. All it had required to put that dog under was a simple animation charm on a flute to put it to sleep.

The Devil's Snare had been easy enough to deal with, just staying still until it let him down. He had thought about burning it but he needed the protections to still be in place so no one would know the Stone was gone.

The flying keys had been even easier to handle than the Devil's Snare. A simple summoning charm had done the trick. Though, the mere fact that one of the protections for the Stone was to test ones flying ability was very suspicious in Harry's opinion.

The chess set had likewise been dealt with easily enough. He had simply used his invisibility cloak and a levitation charm to float himself above the set. That had required a bit more magic than he usually used, but thankfully having a wand made the task easier.

Likewise, the Trolls weren't much of a challenge. Not that he had challenged them, simply walked right past them while still under the cloak. Honestly, he wasn't sure how they expected these minor enchantments to protect the Stone, especially when a first year, albeit one smarter than most but still a first year, could get through them with relative ease.

If he were going to hide the Stone, then it would be with the most powerful wards and enchantments the Goblin's of Gringotts could come up with...maybe even by casting the Fidelius Charm he had read about in one of the books he had gotten from the library's restricted section.

Shaking the thoughts off he drunk the potion that would allow him to walk through the fire, it was actual a simple potion to concoct, compared to ones like the animagus revealing potion he had made. He walked forward, seeing but not feeling the flames as they licked at him. He couldn't see more than a foot or two in front of him but it didn't really matter, a few moments after he had entered he came out the other side and found himself in the last chamber.

It was circular and there was almost completely bare, except for the center where the Mirror of Erised stood. Harry walked up to the Mirror, if the other enchantments had been the head of houses, then

this one had to be Dumbledore's. He wondered how he would get the Stone from this.

As he walked down and stood in front of the mirror he found that, unlike his previous look he was alone and not grown up, the women whose face he could not see and the child who looked like him were not there, nor were his parents. Now it was just him, eleven year old Harry Potter.

The mirror version of him smiled and reached into his robes, Harry raised an eyebrow as his mirror image pulled the Sorcerer's Stone out, grinning as he put the stone back inside his robes. He felt a small lump where the mirror had put the stone and reached into his robes before grabbing the new item in there and pulling it out. There, in his hands was the Sorcerer's Stone.

It took Harry a few seconds to figure out how the Stone came to be in his possession. The magical enchantments around the mirror would only allow someone who wanted the Stone but not use it to have it. It was an interesting bit of magic, very complicated, but also predictable as far as Harry was concerned.

Harry scoffed to himself as he put the Stone back in his robes, walked back through the fire and then pulled out his broom, enlarged it and began to fly through the open doors and then up and out of the trap door. A few moments later he was inside of his dorm room, casting several privacy charms over and around his bed. He opened the trunk to the fourth compartment, the one where he stored odds and ends that he found interesting, wrapping the stone in some cloth he had conjured and placed it inside.

XoX

He sighed as he looked at the Philosopher's Stone, the main reason he had not wanted Hermione to go after the Stone herself. Harry had already had it. Still he could not fault the girl for her enthusiasm, and in truth, it was probably better this way. With the mirror destroyed Dumbledore and everyone else was sure to assume the Stone had been destroyed with it. Had she not been so adamant Harry would have never confronted Voldemort, the mirror would not have been destroyed, and Dumbledore would have found out the Stone was gone when he went to retrieve it. No, it was better that he had confronted Voldemort in that chamber, it added an extra set of

deception that would be difficult for others to see through. It was unlikely anyone would realize the Stone was in his possession because of that.

A message would have to be sent to the Flamels sometime this summer so he could return the Stone to its rightful owner. After all, he wasn't a thief and didn't need to turn metal into gold, and he wasn't all that interested in immortality. Not now at any rate, maybe later in life.

A smile worked its way onto his face. Before he returned it however, he would run some tests to see what this thing was made of.

After all, he would be a fool not to miss this once in a lifetime opportunity to study the most powerful alchemic artifact the world has ever known.

XoX

So how was that for an ending. Harry stole the Philosopher's Stone long before good old Moldywarts even made an attempt at taking it. I thought it would be a nice ending, to have Harry steal the Stone out from under everyone's noses.

For those of you who have been enjoying my story and daily updates, I am both pleased and saddened to announce that with the end of the first book, I will not be updating anymore until Book 2 is complete. I have finished the basic plot-tree, so I know what's going to happen, but it will take a while before my story is finished. Especially because next week I am graduating from college, and after that I need to search for a job. I have no clue how long this will take, but I'm expecting it will be several months before I finish the next book. But do not fret, I will endeavor to begin writing as soon as I am able.

So stay tuned for the next Book, Harry Potter and the Heir of Slytherin.

## Book 2: Harry Potter and the Heir of Slytherin

### Chapter 1: Meeting the Flamels.

XoX

"So tell me what you think," Lisa said as she spun around in a circle before ending in a modeling pose she had once seen on the modeling TV shows she enjoyed watching. she was wearing a black skirt and white sleeveless shirt and an open dark red jacket that was cut at the mid-riff. Her hair was let down, allowing her wavy brown hair to fall down past her shoulder blades, and the outfit finished off with a pair of knee length socks black socks and red converse shoes.

"You look cute," Harry said honestly, "Though I think you should either stick with black or white. I'd go with white since it's summer."

Lisa put her hands on her hips and pouted at him, saying, "I'm just cute? Is that it?"

Harry opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again and repeated this several times before asking, "what do you mean?"

"I mean I get all dressed up, give you a fashion show in new expensive clothes and all you can say is I'm 'cute'," she said, putting quotation marks up when she said cute.

"You do know I'm paying for all the clothes you get here, right?" Harry asked dryly. He didn't give her a chance to say anything as he continued, "anyways, I'm not really sure why my words bother you, you look very cute in those, I thought that was a good thing." He didn't let Lisa see the way his lips twitched, he knew she would get bothered by his choice of words. It seemed that Lisa and her dad had another row about appropriate clothing after he had left once Christmas ended. According to his friend, her dad had tried to make her take back the clothes he had bought for her and that had erupted in an argument of epic proportions. Since then Lisa had been attempting to bother her dad by wearing more and more outrageous clothing.

This in turn led to Lisa wanting to feel 'sexy' as it were. Personally, Harry wasn't quite sure she was ready to wear clothing of that regard, even if she did, the brunette was too young and too

underdeveloped to fit that particular mold. Though that just meant Harry had the perfect opportunity for some mild teasing.

"You would," Lisa grumbled, just loud enough for Harry to hear though he didn't comment.

"So do you want to get those?" he asked.

"Yeah, I guess."

"Ok, we'll grab these and you can get a few more things before we leave."

Lisa nodded and the two went off to more sections of the clothing store. She tried out several more outfits and seemed slightly displeased that Harry called her 'cute' for each one she wore but didn't make any complaints this time as Harry followed her lead out the store. It had only been a few days since he had gotten back from school and Lisa had managed to monopolize most of his time, not that he complained as he had missed her quite a bit, especially as they had been inseparable since they were eight.

By the time they had finished shopping Lisa had gotten several pairs of pants, two skirts, six shirts and a pair of shoes. Harry paid for them with the Muggle money he had converted from his vault at Gringotts and the two set off back towards Lisa house where Harry stayed most of the time. As they walked Harry looked at his best friends lightly peeved expression.

"Are you ok, Lisa?" he asked.

"I'm fine," she said in a slightly snappish voice.

"You don't seem ok," Harry frowned and placed a hand on her shoulder, stopping them both from walking. "What's wrong?" he asked in a soft voice. He already knew what her problem was of course, but he also knew that letting her know that he knew would be hazardous to his health.

Lisa sighed and slumped her shoulders as he used that caring voice that never failed to rid her of any anger she had for the raven haired wizard. "Nothing, I just, I thought with my new clothes and everything that I would be more than just a cute little girl," she said.



"Your only twelve years old, Lisa," Harry said in amusement. "You are a cute little girl."

"I am not!" she said, instantly feeling irate. "I'm not an eight year old little kid anymore!"

"No, but your still young," said Harry. Before Lisa could explode he said, "give it a few years and you'll be one of the most beautiful girls on the planet."

That got a good reaction as Lisa turned a pretty shade of pink. "Do you really think so?" she asked shyly.

"Hmmm..." Harry made exaggerated thinking noises before he said, "nope, I was lying."

"What!" she turned a glare on Harry but he just laughed, stuck his tongue at her and began running away, her shopping bags still in his arm.

"Harry! Grrr, get back here!" she shouted as she began running to catch up.

"Never, you'll have to catch me!" he shouted as he looked back behind him. She growled as she ran after him, towards the small park her parents were going to meet them at. She noticed that she was catching up to Harry as he had to set the bags down by a tree and so she sped up. Harry only had a little time to run before he was tackled to the ground.

Lisa grinned triumphantly as she sat on top of him. "What were you saying about me being one the of most beautiful girls on the planet?" she asked.

"I don't remember saying anything about that," Harry said, laughing when he saw Lisa's face turn slightly red. He used her distracted state to roll them over so that he was the one on top and grinned, "now that I have the advantage, I need to find a suitable punishment for you tackling me. You could have really hurt me, you know?"

"And here I was thinking you were made of tougher stuff," Lisa baited, "sissy."

"Oh that's it!" Harry growled playfully as his hands went to her sides and began to tickle her mercilessly.

"Harry! Stop! HAHA...stop it!" Lisa shouted between laughs, however, Harry did not stop until she became completely breathless. Grinning he rolled over so he was lying on his back next to her. "Sometimes...sometimes I really hate you," she gasped as she tried to regain her breath.

"No you don't," Harry shot back, "you love me, how could you not love your big brother?" he questioned, using the title she had given him during the first few months after they had met.

Lisa's smile didn't quite reach her eyes as she said, "yeah, big brother..."

Harry frowned and was about to ask her if something was wrong when they both heard a voice calling out to them.

"Lisa, Harry!" turning the two saw Mrs. Crawft waving at them by her car. The two got up and Harry picked up the bags filled with clothes before following Lisa over to her mom. Harry ran up ahead of his friend and opened the door for her, getting a smile before he climbed in and set the bags on the floor. The two strapped in as Mrs. Crawft started the car and they left.

"So how was your day?" she asked.

"Good," Harry said as Lisa placed her head on his shoulder. "Lisa and I got a few new clothes and we went to see that new movie that came out, Aladdin."

"You really didn't have to buy those for her, Harry," Mrs. Crawft said, knowing that he had paid for all of her daughters clothes. She had been told by Lisa about the amount of money he had tossed around, as well as how he had gotten it. She knew Harry had gotten an inheritance from his parents and was pretty rich, but she still felt uncomfortable having him pay for her daughters clothes.

Harry shrugged the shoulder that wasn't being used as a pillow and said, "I don't mind, my parent's left me rich and I figured it would be better to use it on my best friend then just let it sit there."

Lisa heard Harry's words and smiled a little. She scooted closer to him and leaned her head on his shoulder, reveling in being able to be this close to Harry after having not seen him for a year. Without really thinking about it, Harry placed an arm around her shoulder and Lisa sighed before snuggling herself even closer to him.

Mr. Crawft just shook her head, they had this argument before and she knew that she would never win. She could of course, forbid him from buying her things, or even keep Lisa from him until he stopped as was her husbands suggestion. But they both knew that would only cause the rift that had sprung up between Lisa and her father since Christmas to widen."So how was the movie?" she asked, switching topics.

"It was good," Harry said, "I think the genie was my favorite, he was pretty funny. Though Lisa loved the sappy parts more."

"They were romantic," Lisa said, defending her actions, "and the singing was good to."

"As I said, all the sappy parts," Harry chuckled when Lisa swatted his arm good naturedly. When the car pulled up Harry and Lisa got out of the car and made their way to her room where Harry set down the clothes they had gotten.

"Are you staying for dinner?" she asked, looking around her room as she tried to appear nonchalant.

Harry smiled, "if you want me to, it's not like the Dursley's have anything good to eat that you guys don't, and it's better when your mum makes it anyways."

"You just don't want to cook your own food," she teased as they made their way into the living room and turned the TV on. They stayed that way for nearly an hour, Lisa sitting on the couch with Harry's head in her lap while she played with his hair. He would never admit it, even under penalty of death, but Harry loved the feeling of having someone run their fingers through his hair.

About two hours later Mrs. Crawft called out to them and they had dinner with her parents. It was a much more quiet affair than normal, mainly because of Lisa and her father weren't on the best of terms

anymore. Harry did his best to ignore that as he spoke with Lisa and her mom, knowing that talking to Mr. Crawft wouldn't be the best thing to do at the moment. He felt slightly bad, feeling as if he had caused the rift due to the present he had gotten Lisa for Christmas, though Mrs. Crawft assured him it wasn't his fault and this was bound to happen as Lisa grew older anyway.

After dinner Harry said goodbye and left for the night. It was such a nice night that he decided to walk home instead of heading to the park and apparating straight to his room as he was wont to do.

Quietly opening the door, he took out his key, shut and locked it before heading upstairs. All of the lights within the house were shut off and Harry figured that the Dursley's were asleep. He stepped into his room and shut the door before stripping down to his boxers. Going over to his trunk he opened it up and pulled out a book he was reading on advanced fourth year charms, closed it, then sat down on his bed and got comfortable as he flipped the book open and began to read. After an hour or two of reading Harry set the book down and did his nightly meditation before closing his eyes to let sleep claim him.

XoX

It was early the next morning and Harry had just finished his workout and shower and was writing down some more notes as he studied the results of the examination spells he had used on the Philosopher's Stone when Hedwig flew in through the window.

"Hey, Hedwig," he greeted as the owl flew over to him and nipped his ear affectionately. A wave of his hand later and the trunk had opened and several owl treats had flown into his hand. As he fed the treats to his thankful owl Harry looked at his notes and the red stone he had been studying when he had free time. It was an ingenious piece of work and Harry could understand why it was considered the highest creation of alchemy. Despite the amount of studying he had done, Harry was no closer to learning how it was created other than its basic chemical make-up.

"I don't think I'm gonna learn much more about this, Hed," Harry said to his owl, who just looked at him before drinking from her water bowl. He sighed, "I think I'd better let the Flamels know I have their stone now."

Getting out some parchment and a calligraphy pen Harry quickly began to jot down a letter:

Dear N.F.

I doubt you know who this is and due to what this letter is about it might be best not to say in a letter. Suffice to say, I have something that belongs to you and wish to give it back, a friend of yours had brought it to Hogwarts and I figured it would be safer somewhere else. If you want it back just respond to this letter and I'll have Hedwig send it to you.

Sincerely,

J.P.

Satisfied with his writing Harry folded the letter up and placed it in an envelope where he stamped it with his family crest (he had the goblins make it for him during his last visit to Gringotts). He turned to his owl and asked, "Hey, Hedwig, you up for delivering a letter?"

Hedwig looked at him and hooted indignantly, as if to say 'who do you think your talking to?' before sticking her leg out.

"Right, right, sorry," Harry apologized as he tied the letter to her leg. "Take this to the Flamels ok?" he said, getting his snowy owl to bob her head up and down, nipped his finger with affection and then she took off out the window. Harry watched his familiar and friend until she was no longer visible before he decided to get out of the house.

XoX

Harry entered the dojo to hear the sounds of shouts and smiled when he saw a bunch of students moving through their kata's, Master Wei going around them and correcting the students all the while spewing insults at them. He walked up to the mat and stood there, waiting.

"Ah, Harry," Master Wei said, "just the person I've been waiting for. Get suited up and come back out."

"Shì, Shifu," Harry replied, bowing before he moved along the rear wall and into the locker room. He came back out less than a minute later in a black gi. The mat had been cleared and the students were all sitting around the edge, the master of the dojo was standing in the center where Harry met him.

"I want you to go through all of the kata's you have so far," Master Wei commanded.

"Right!" Harry was slightly surprised and a little disgruntled by having to go through all of his kata, it would likely take two or three hours to finish them all. However, he also knew it was better to just do as his Shifu told him, it was less painful that way.

He slid into the beginning position for his first kata and swiftly started moving, starting with several Muay Thai knee strikes before spinning on the balls of his feet, dodging an imaginary enemy as he struck out with a knife edge that would have blocked the blood flow of the carotid artery of his imaginary opponent. His movements began to speed up as he spun himself in the air and launched a powerful reverse kick that would have crushed someone's windpipe should it hit, landing on his feet before he pushed himself on his hands and locked his leg around an imaginary head, then twisting his body around and smashing his imaginary enemy into the ground before he pushed back up. He continued moving through his kata's, even as Master Wei lectured.

"I want all of you to watch this movement," he was saying. "With much training and practice you can accomplish this combination of constitution, fluidity, speed and power. Notice the styles he is using, no two people ever have the same style and those who have talent in martial combat can mix different styles to suit their own needs."

Some of the things that Master Wei was saying were actually rather flattering, however, the people he was training right now were all fairly new, white to blue belts. His Shifu usually held him up as an example to the newer students when he was in at the same time the old man was teaching them.

It was precisely three hours later that Harry had finally finished, his breathing was still light but there was now a sheen of sweat covering him from the amount of movement he had been going through. With

a deep breath he moved into his start position and then stood up straight.

"Good," Master Wei said, "now that Harry is finished I want all of you to pick a partner and start sparring. Harry, your with me."

"Yes, Shifu," Harry replied as he and Master Wei chose a spot a little ways away from the other students.

"Now, show me how much you've improved."

Harry nodded before moving, coming in close and using his legs to launch several kicks, high, low, mid, jump and spin, sweep, switch feet and a reverse kick to the solar plexus. He continued to launch his feet at the old man who dodged and weaved between his attacks, taunting him.

"You will have to better than that, child," he said. Harry frowned as he began to mix it up, going from kicks to punches, then back to kicks. Throughout it all his sensei never attacked, content with just dodging and redirecting Harry's attacks with minimal effort. It was the difference in their style, where Harry's movements were always fairly flashy, with advanced movements and attack combinations. Master Wei's fighting style was smooth and flowed like water. He used the least amount of movement to get the best results.

After attempting to sweep Master Wei off of his feet Harry planted his hands on the ground and kicked out with a foot. Master Wei merely used his hand to bring the foot up and over his head by grabbing him by the ankles, however, once his foot reached the apex of it's height Harry twisted, letting his leg knock into his sensei's head. At least it would have, if Master Wei had not expected it and ducked accordingly.

"You have more variety than our last spar," he commented lightly as he continued dodging. "But it's still not enough."

On Harry's next attack, a high kick, low kick, double palm thrust combination, Master Wei struck back. His brought his two hands up and deflected Harry's, bringing them above the raven haired youths head. A thrust of his own palms and Harry was hit in the stomach and sent crashing to the ground, gasping for breath.

"I hope that's not all you have," Master Wei commented as he stood there, his hands at his sides and seemingly defenseless.

Harry knew better, he sprung off the ground with his hands and began sending faster and more precise strikes than before, mixing his attacks between his styles, palm thrusts, knife strikes, standard punches, he aimed for both nerve endings and pressure points in his attempt to hit his sensei.

All his attempts were skillfully blocked and Harry once again found himself on the ground, this time from a kick to the gut.

The spar continued on for an hour before Harry was too exhausted to continue, he still couldn't get anywhere near the old man, throughout their entire spar he had been incapable of touching the man once.

"I believe that is enough," Master Wei said. "Come, you must tend to the other students with me."

Harry nodded, still too tired to talk. He had to wait for a moment before he even had the energy to move. When he did he straightened up and began making rounds around the students, settling disputes when spars got too rough, correcting posture and making sure no one cheated by fighting dirty. A few of the students who were older than him tried to dispute his authority and ended up on the ground until they agreed with him, he normally didn't need to do that but sometimes the newer students who didn't know him wouldn't listen because they doubted his ability. He continued this for the last hour that this class lasted, and when it was over he made his way to the showers, then got dressed.

"I'll see you later Master Wei," Harry called out as he left.

"Of course, keep practicing," his Shifu said as the door closed.

Harry waved over his shoulder as he exited the building. Walking at a brisk pace he quickly made his way over to Lisa's house, stopping in front of the door and knocking.

"Hello, Harry," Mrs. Crawft said as she opened the door all the way and gestured for him to come in. "Lisa's in her room."



"Thank you," Harry said and quickly made his way to her room. When he got to Lisa's room it was to hear loud music blaring from within. He knocked several times but when no one answered he twisted the door knob – it was unlocked – and entered.

The sight that greeted him was one of the most amusing he had seen, even compared to some of the things he had seen his best friend doing. Lisa was standing on her bed, dancing and singing to some kind of female pop artist (Harry didn't know who, but she sounded American). She had a brush in her hands and was using it as a microphone to sing, her eyes were closed so she couldn't see Harry watching her. When she finished Harry let out a loud whistle.

"KYA!" Lisa spun around to see who had entered her room, only to get her feet tangled in her sheets and fall onto the floor, landing on her backside. "Owch," she rubbed her sore back end before looking up seeing Harry standing in front of her with a large grin.

"Nice singing," he commented, his smile growing at seeing the embarrassed blush spread across her face.

"Harry, you jerk! Don't you knock?" she said, making an attempt at reclaiming her lost dignity.

"I did," Harry said, his smile growing slightly, "several times in fact. I think you were just too busy playing pop star to hear it."

The red that had been across her cheeks spread across the rest of her face and neck, causing Harry to chuckle a bit as he held out a hand. Lisa looked at it for a moment and Harry had less than a second to see the mischievous spark in his friend's eyes before he was yanked onto the floor. Harry fell quickly as Lisa jumped up and attacked.

"Get off," Harry said to Lisa, who was sitting on his back with an unrepentant grin on her face.

"Uh uh, I don't think so," she said, "not until you've apologized for barging into my room."

"I didn't barge in," Harry said, defending his actions. "You just didn't answer the door, besides, I always let myself into your room and you've never complained before."

Lisa blushed but regained her composure by saying, "that's different, I wasn't singing than was I?"

"How was I to know you were singing?" asked Harry, "the music was so loud that I couldn't hear anything else." He shifted a bit, "now, can you please get off?"

"Let me think about it," Lisa a hand under her cheek and tapped it with a finger. "Nope!" she said cheerfully.

"Fine, you asked for it!"

"What are you – Eek!" Lisa shrieked as Harry bucked up, sending her flying off of him and landing back on the ground. Grinning, Harry picked her up and slung Lisa over his shoulder and began to walk towards the door.

"Harry! Put me down!" she shouted as she banged her fists on his back, "put me down this instant!"

"Hmmm...let me think about it, nope!" he said, parroting her earlier words as he walked out towards the door.

"Do I want to know where your taking my daughter?" a voice said from behind them.

"Just taking her to the park, Mrs. Crawft," Harry replied casually.

"I see," Mrs. Crawft looked amused

"Don't listen to him, mum! He's trying to kidnap me!" Lisa yelled from her spot on Harry's shoulder.

"Oh, well, Kevin and I could use some peace and quiet," Mrs. Crawft mused.

"What!" Lisa yelled as she gave her mother an incredulous look. "You would let him kidnap your only daughter!"

"Just be sure you have her back in time for dinner," Mrs. Crawft said, heading back into the kitchen

"Sure thing," Harry said as he left the house.

"I hate you," Lisa mumbled.

"No you don't," Harry returned, "we both know you could never hate me." He stopped and gently set her back on her feet, smiling as he held out his hand, "go to the park with me?"

Lisa laughed as she grabbed his hand and started pulling him, "alright, but I want it noted that I do this under protest."

A smart remark about how she was the one that was now pulling him came to his lips, but he held off. "Duly noted," he said instead.

They soon found themselves at the park and Lisa ran over to the swings, sitting down on one of them and giving Harry a pout complete with large puppy dog eyes. "Push me?" she said.

Harry gave an exaggerated sigh as he moved behind Lisa and began to push her. "You're so bossy," he grumbled, just loud enough for her to hear. Lisa snorted, but didn't comment as she kicked her legs to get higher. The two spent the next hour playing on all of the old play sets, they went down the slide, well, Lisa went down the slide, Harry ran up it and then Lisa complained that wasn't how slides were supposed to be used. They played around on the monkey bars, Lisa used them to show Harry some of the gymnastics moves her school coach was teaching while he hung upside down like a bat. Several other people came in, older couples with children, but the two friends ignored them as they ran around and played like they did when they were younger.

"You know you sound like a cat with that purr," Harry commented with an amused smile. The two had run around for two hours before Lisa had gotten tired, and went to sit under the shade of the tree. Harry was leaning against the trunk while Lisa had decided to plop her head in his lap. Currently, Harry was running her hand through her hair and Lisa was letting out an odd purring noise.

"Shut up," Lisa mumbled, her eyes closed at the moment as she let out a sigh. Opening them again she looked at Harry, "You know I never said anything before, but you seem different."

"Different how?" asked Harry, looking down at his friend.

"I don't know, you just seem more outgoing... happier, I guess..." she trailed off and scrunched up her face in a look of cute contemplation.

Her observation caught Harry by surprise for a moment. Was he happier? For the past several years he had never been necessarily unhappy. At the same time he couldn't really say he had been all that happy either. Sure he had his moments, like when he was playing in a football competition or sparring with Master Wei or some of the other students. He was especially content when he was with Lisa.

But he had to admit that she might have a point. Before Hogwarts he would not have teased Lisa as much as he had been doing now, normally it would be the other way around. This summer, and even at Christmas, Harry had been more talkative and – happy – he guessed, then he used to be.

Maybe that was the benefit of having friends who were magical like him. Where he didn't have to hide his abilities. Where he could more or less be himself.

"Well of course I'm happy," Harry said with a bright smile. "After all, I get to spend three months with my best friend. How couldn't I be?" He laughed when he saw Lisa blush and look away.

XoX

The days came and went and soon enough his first week of summer had passed. Hedwig had yet to return from delivering his letter to the Flamels, but Harry wasn't too concerned. They lived somewhere near France so it would probably take a few days just to get to the Flamel estate. Of more concern was that Harry had sent several letters to his friends, using the owl post office in Diagon Alley and had yet to receive a letter from them. He wasn't sure if he should be worried or not, considering he had never really sent letters to anyone aside from when he had bought his friends Christmas presents, and he had not expected to get something returned for those anyways.

As it was Harry's life at the Dursley's residence went on the same as usual, until one evening after he had come back from going to the movies with Lisa. Harry was sitting down at his desk, reading from a

charms book he had gotten on animation charms, when Hedwig flew back into his room.

"Hey, girl," he greeted as the snowy owl perched herself on his desk. "You've been gone for a while, long trip?"

Hedwig bobbed her head up and down before sticking out her leg. Harry glanced at it and saw the letter, he quickly untied the letter around her leg before summoning some owl treats for her. "Take a rest of Hedwig, traveling from London to France and back must be tiring," he said to the owl as he looked at the envelope.

It looked similar to the envelope that had his Hogwarts letter in it, the only difference was the wax crest. It was a carving of two wands crossed and a Rune Eternal symbol behind it. Curious about the contents of the letter Harry broke the seal and opened the envelope, pulling out the letter which read:

Dear J.P.

Let me start by saying your owl is the most persistent creature I've ever seen. She had flown around our house for nearly two days and somehow managed to get passed our wards.

I won't beat around the bush, judging from the letter you sent me I have a pretty good idea what item of mine you have in your possession. And if you really do have what I am thinking of, then the two of us most definitely need to talk face to face. This letter is also a portkey that will take you to my estate in Devon, just tap it with your wand and say Alchemy.

I hope to see you soon so we can have a serious discussion.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Flamel

Harry read the letter with a thoughtful frown, Nicholas Flamel wanted to meet him, this could be a great opportunity to pick the brain of the man who had created the most sought after work of alchemy. Of course, it could just as easily be that Nicholas wanted the stone and would then send him back home. Still, if the man just wanted the

stone he could have asked Harry to send it to him. Either way, Harry decided that he was going to go.

He looked over at the Philosopher's Stone, which was sitting on his desk, gleaming with the strange red glow it had when the sunlight hit it. Walking over he picked it up and pocketed into the left pocket of his jeans.

"Alchemy," Harry muttered as he tapped the letter with his wand. The next thing he knew was the feeling of something pulling on his gut as sucked into what reminded Harry greatly of a wormhole, or hyperspace from Star Wars. There were multiple colors whirling around him in a fast blur and Harry had to squeeze his eyes shut for fear of getting sick.

This was far worse than the first time he had ever purposefully apparated, he remembered the feeling of being squeezed through a tube and not being able to breathe when he had jumped from the ground to a roof. The feeling he got from this portkey was like having someone hook his gut and drag him several thousand miles per hour through the air. Add in the coloring and it made for one dizzying ride.

Harry's feet suddenly hit the ground, causing him to stumble before he fell to the ground, dry heaving. "Ugh, I don't think I'm ever going to use that form of travel unless I have to," he mumbled as he climbed back to his feet. A pop to his left made him turn his head, he saw a house elf dressed in a tunic with the Flamel coat of arms.

"Um...hello?" Harry said uncertainly.

"Est-ce que vous êtes le Maître de personne Flamel envoyé la lettre à ?" the House elf said in French.

Harry blinked for a second as he translated the sentence to English, he had never had anyone speak to him in French but he had studied the language along with several others in his free time. "Oui. Mon nom est le Potier d'Harry James," Harry said in passable French.

"Droit cette façon," The house elf said, turning and walking towards a door. Harry frowned for a moment before following the house elf as he entered a doorway. They followed a long corridor before entering a door on the left, it led to what looked like a study with

several shelves filled with books and a small gathering of chairs and couches centering around a coffee table. "Veuillez prendre un siège, le maître sera avec vous sous peu," the house elf said before disappearing with a pop.

Making his way over to one of the chairs Harry sat down, he made note that the chairs were a lot more comfortable than they looked. He figured they probably had comfort charms on them.

The door opened and Harry turned his head to see a man who looked to be somewhere in his mid to late thirties entered. He had blond hair and blue eyes and was wearing a gray robe that seemed to have an odd shimmer when he walked. For a moment Harry wondered who this was, he looked far too young to be Nicolas Flamel, famed scholar and alchemist. Then again, with an object like the Sorcerer's Stone, eternal youth may just be a part of using the elixir of life. His older appearance was likely just so people would not realize just how powerful the Sorcerer's Stone truly was.

Harry stood up quickly and offered a bow, showing respect to the person whose home he had entered. "C'est un plaisir de vous rencontrer, monsieur Flamel," Harry said as he rose from his bow. "Mon nom est Harry Potter."

The man paused mid-stride as he heard Harry speaking in passable French and raised an eyebrow, his eyes trailed across Harry's face before resting on his scar. "Mr. Potter," he said in English, not even a trace of a French accent in his voice. "Now this is a surprise, when I had received that letter claiming you had something of mine, I was not expecting the Boy-Who-Lived to be the one who sent it."

Harry shifted uncomfortably at the title. "That's understandable," he said slowly, "especially given that I have only just started school at Hogwarts."

"A first year then?" the man questioned, walking the rest of the way into the room. He held out his hand, "I suppose I should give an introduction, I am Nicholas Flamel, though, I suspect you already knew that."

"Yes, sir," said Harry, taking the offered hand and shaking it firmly. "I must admit, you look... younger than I expected."

Mr Flamel chuckled a bit, "one of the many benefits of immortality. After all, what would immortality be without eternal youth as well."

Harry nodded as his theory was confirmed. "Good point."

"And now that introductions are out of the way," Mr. Flamel sat down heavily and gestured for Harry to do the same. "I believe we need to talk."

"Of course, but first," Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out the Philosopher's Stone. "I believe this is yours," he said, handing the stone over to Flamel who took it.

"The Philosopher's Stone," Mr. Flamel whispered, as if he had not truly expected Harry to have it. He looked over at Harry and said, "I suspect, you have a rather fascinating story to tell, Mr. Potter."

"I do," Harry admitted before he began his tale, speaking of how he had first discovered something off when Dumbledore had warned the students that the third floor corridor was off limits to those who did not wish to die a painful death. "Honestly, at first, I was just concerned that the man was absolutely off his rocker."

"He does seem that way quite often, doesn't he?" said Mr. Flamel with a look of remembrance. "He was almost always that way, even when he was only seventy years old he was just as...off, he would say or do things that made very little sense to others. I believe it was just another sign of his genius, most prodigies are like that, eccentric in their own way."

Harry shrugged, "I'll take your word for it. Anyways, after that school had started and during my first week I had gone to see a man called Hagrid, who is the game keeper at Hogwarts; that was when I got my second clue." He paused for a moment, as if to build up the suspense. "Hagrid, who although a very nice person is rather simple minded, he does not think too deeply about things and can't keep a secret to save his life. I found a newspaper article about a Break-in at Gringotts in his hut, it seemed odd to me that he would be reading about something like that, unless of course he knew more about it than he wanted to let on."

"So you suspected that he had more personal involvement in the break-in?" asked Flamel for clarification.



"Actually I suspected he was the one who took the object that the person who did the break-in was trying to steal out," corrected Harry. "As I said, he is rather simple minded, and his devotion to Dumbledore is second to none."

"I see," Flamel looked at Harry thoughtfully before gesturing for him to continue.

Harry did so, telling Flamel about how Ron, a loud-mouthed braggart who seemed to be jealous of anyone above his station, was telling fanciful tales about running into a large Three-headed dog. "I had actually gone to confirm the existence of this 'three-headed dog'," he said, putting quotation marks up around the words 'three-headed dog'. "Turns out Ron was telling the truth, on the third floor corridor was a large Cerberus standing on top of a trap door. That was when I realized that Professor Dumbledore was hiding or guarding something at Hogwarts."

"It took a bit of research, having someone try to kill me on my broom, and saying things in a way that made Hagrid slip up, but eventually I found out that what was hidden under the Cerberus had something to do with you," Harry said. By this point Flamel was actually fairly well immersed in the story, he found it astounding that this young boy found out so much. "It only took a little research for your name before I found out you were an accomplished alchemist and the only person to create the Philosopher's Stone. And after that..." he shrugged, "well, it wasn't hard to figure out what the dog was guarding."

"So after you found out that the Stone was at Hogwarts you moved past the Cerberus and what ever other enchantments Dumbledore put up to get it?" asked Nicholas.

"No," Harry said with a shake of his head. "At first, I wanted nothing to do with the Stone." He sighed, "however, one of my friends was rather persistent when she found out about it. Once she began sticking her nose in I decided that the Stone was simply too dangerous to leave alone. I went after it about two months before school ended and then near the end of the school year I went down and confronted Voldemort, who was after the Stone himself and pretended to destroy it so that no one would know it still existed."

"How did you do that?"

"The Stone was being guarded by the Mirror of Erised," Harry answered. "Through a nifty little enchantment that made it so that only those who wanted the Stone but not use it, could get to it. I destroyed the mirror with a reductor curse, ensuring that everyone would assume the Stone was destroyed with it."

"That's a rather fascinating tale, Mr. Potter," Flamel said after a long pause. "If you hadn't come to me with the Stone in hand, I might not have believed it. Even with the report Dumbledore gave me your story still seems far-fetched."

Harry shrugged. "I can understand why you would think that, the story sounds ridiculous," he said. A sigh escaped his lips, "of course, considering who I am, this story may not be quite as outrageous as it would if someone else were to tell it."

Nicholas studied the young man in front of him. "What you say is true," he finally said. "Given who you are and that you have already faced Voldemort once..."

As he trailed off Harry adopted a surprised look. "Did you know you're the first person besides myself and Dumbledore who actually use Voldemort's name?" he asked.

Nicholas smile and replied with, "I have lived over six hundred years young man, I do not fear a name." A frown crossed his face before he spoke again, "thinking about all that you have told me I am not surprised by the events that have happened to you."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, his face adopting a confused look.

"I mean your story about how you discovered the Philosopher Stone," Nicholas said. "All of the clues that led you to the Stone, Dumbledore's warning, the newspaper, Hagrids loose lips and the attempts on your life. It is quite possible that the Stone was used as bait to lure Voldemort to Hogwarts."

Harry frowned thoughtfully and leaned back in his chair. "You mean Dumbledore brought the stone to Hogwarts with the purpose of luring the Dark Lord into the open?" asked Harry in a silent whisper.

The mere thought that the man charged with the safety of the school may have willingly let a murderer with a soul as dark as Voldemort's into a school was enough to fill him with rage.

Harry always tried to hold himself to a strict code of conduct, rules with which he lived by. One of the reasons he had taken up defending those weaker than himself against Dudley and his gang was because of this code, a code he had created in order to, in a way, make up for how ruthless and heartless he had become once he began to actively use magic. What Dumbledore did, putting the students of Hogwarts in danger of a madman was in direct violation of his morals and one of the few ways to truly anger Harry.

Nicholas seemed to have sensed Harry's rising ire, of course, it may have had something to do with the fact that Harry had a magical aura surrounding him. His hair was beginning to blow as if caught in a stiff breeze and his eyes were beginning to crackle with energy. It looked like he had lightning stored behind his eyes. It was frightening to Nicholas, that a child his age could have enough power to create a magical aura when people three to four times his age could not. The boy must be extremely magically gifted.

"It is possible," he said, hoping the boy would calm down if they continued speaking. "I have known Dumbledore for many years and I know that he is something of a schemer, he might be willing to do something like this if he thought it was for the greater good."

"The greater good?" asked Harry, "whose greater good? His?"

"No," Nicholas said, "Dumbledore believes that the greater good is in helping the greatest number of people. Sometimes, when people age they become disassociated with the rest of humanity. They tend to see the large crowds rather than the faces within that crowd. I myself often find that I don't particularly care about the human race as a whole, in fact, only Perennial really matters to me anymore."

Harry took a deep breath as he tried to reign in his anger, it was surprising that he could get this angry considering he had always had a supreme amount of control over his emotions since he was eight. "So your saying Dumbledore doesn't really see the people he is trying to help? Instead he sees them as pieces to move on a chess board?" he asked.

"Not so much pieces like a pawn," said Nicholas. "But he tends to look at the larger picture and can't see the smaller details within that picture, it's part of the reason he was so bad at alchemy."

That made a deal of sense, in its own way. History often had people who were like that, they believed what they were doing was for the benefit of all, but didn't quite see the people that they felt would benefit from what they were doing. Often these great men and women would never tell others what they were doing or how the people under them would benefit from this, simply expecting them to fall in step and do as they were told. Of course, often times these great people suffered great tragedies due to the fact that they rarely trusted others, and it usually led to their downfall.

"I understand," Harry said at last, "history has many people similar to him."

"Indeed it does," Nicholas nodded in agreement. "Though this could all just be speculation as well. I did ask him to look after the Stone for me once I realized someone was trying to steal it. It is quite possible he felt Hogwarts was the safest place. With himself, and several of the most powerful witches and wizards as teachers there, Hogwarts is very defensible." He paused for a moment and looked at Harry before asking, "now that you know this, I'm curious what it is you plan to do with this knowledge?"

"Nothing," Harry said after a moment of thinking about it. "Unless Dumbledore does something that is a direct threat to myself or others than there is no real problem between us." Harry shrugged and continued, "if Dumbledore brings me or my friends into one of his plots we'll have words then. Do you think he left those clues for me to find out about the Stone?"

"Unlikely," Nicholas answered after a moment. "Dumbledore had likely left the clues for Voldemort himself," he said. He paused a moment later before adding, "of course, it is possible that he wanted to get you involved, if he felt there was an important reason for you to be."

Harry closed his eyes in thought. It was a very real possibility that Dumbledore had brought him into his plan against Voldemort, especially if he knew of the prophecy.

He wouldn't discount Dumbledore from knowing, at the same time there was no way for Harry to be certain that he knew, not unless he asked, and there was no way he would. He couldn't, not without giving himself away and revealing more secrets than he was comfortable with.

"You're a very remarkable young man," Nicholas' voice snapped Harry out of his reverie.

"Thank you," Harry responded.

"I appreciate the effort you went to in order to bring the Philosopher's Stone," Nicholas continued.

"I wasn't doing it for you," Harry said dryly.

Nicholas raised an eyebrow, "oh?"

"I did for my friends, for their safety," Harry said.

"Yes, you did tell me that, didn't you?" Nicholas questioned rhetorically. "Still you returned the stone to me when you could have kept it, and I am very thankful for that, thus I feel you deserve some kind of reward."

"Uh, I don't really need anything," Harry said dumbly. "I studied the stone for an entire week before I even sent the letter to you, really that's more than enough of a reward."

Nicholas looked at Harry with an appraising eye. His respect for the child had just gone up; he had heard the truth in Harry's voice when he said that the only reason he had gone after the stone was to protect his friends, but it was clear the young boy knew not to pass up a great opportunity when presented to him.

"You know, learning the spells necessary to study the stone are very powerful and very hard to find," Nicholas commented lightly.

"Only to those who don't have access to one of the largest magical libraries in England," Harry shot back. After Christmas Professor McGonagall had given him unlimited access to the restricted section for his independent research so long as he promised not to look at

books geared towards the dark arts. He had used that opportunity to find out all he could on the Stone and spells that would help him.

The benefits of being the favorite student of your teachers.

"Ah, I see," Nicholas said, nodding his head in understanding, he knew a lot about the library at Hogwarts and knew there would be something of that nature there. "And what have you found out about the Philosopher's Stone?" he asked.

"Not as much as I would have liked," Harry admitted with a sigh. "I know what the stone is made of, I know about the chemical reaction that can turn any metal into gold and I know how the stone creates the elixir of life." He leaned back in his seat and ran a hand through his hair, "but I don't know enough about Alchemy itself to recreate the stone or even create something basic using alchemy."

"Why is that?" asked Nicholas.

"There weren't very many books on Alchemy," said Harry, frowning a little. "And all of the books I did find were far too advanced for me to actually understand." A frustrated sigh escaped his lips, this was one of the curses that came with a perfect memory, even though he had memorized all of the books he had read on alchemy, without the basics to use as a stepping stone they were just useless pieces of information that he couldn't make heads or tails of. It was one of the few frustrations in his life.

"And if I were to help give you a foundation for alchemy, what would you do with it?" asked Nicholas.

"Huh?" replied Harry as he blinked at the man who stood up.

"Follow me," he said, moving towards the door.

Harry frowned but stood up and walked out with the old alchemist. They made their way through a hall, down several flights of stairs and more doors than most people could keep track. Harry memorized the entire layout of where he was, through no conscious effort of his own.

By the time the two of them stepped through the last door they were in what could almost pass for a potions lab. It was a clean, circular

room with shelves lining the walls, on those shelves were objects of all kinds, strange ingredients that were kept in jars, vials, boxes or just floating in the air. There were machines that whirred and whizzed and bubbled, making Harry wonder what their purpose was. Several shelves were lined with aging books that made Harry's finger twitch as he felt the desire to read them, and in the center of the room was a clean table made out of a richly colored wood, several objects on the table that reminded Harry of a potions kit, only this kit looked more advanced than anything he had ever seen and there was no cauldron.

"What is this place?" asked Harry as Nicholas Flammel walked over to the book shelves.

"My lab," he answered as he ran a finger over the spines of each book, reading the titles until he stopped at one of them and grabbed it. "This is where I create all of my alchemic creations, the lab has several powerful wards that protect the area and myself from getting destroyed in case of accidents." The ancient but still middle aged looking man handed the book over to Harry who read the title in curiosity.

"A Beginners Guide to Alchemy: The Alchemic Revolution, written by Henry Flamel," he looked up at Nicholas with undisguised curiosity. "Henry Flamel?"

"My father," said Nicholas, "he wrote that book and it was that book that started me on the path of alchemy."

"And your giving this to me?" asked Harry unsurely, it seemed like that was what was happening but one could never be sure.

"No," replied Flamel, "that book means too much for me to let someone just take it."

"Then why –"

"But I am going to let you read it," he said, interrupting Harry from speaking. "You will be staying here for the next month, I will be teaching you the basics of alchemy, you will read the books I give you and then I will test you on the knowledge gained with a series of tests. You will do this until I am satisfied that my expectations have been met."

Harry's mouth worked for several minutes before he finally spoke, "it sounds like you're not even giving me a choice."

"Would you say no if I did?" asked Nicholas.

Harry thought about it for a moment, he was going to really miss out on some time he could spend with Lisa, which sucked since he could only see her during the summer. But if he only stayed for a month he should be able to make it up to her by spending extra time with her during the last month before he went back to school. And really, how many people got a chance to study alchemy with the greatest alchemist in the last several centuries?

"No, I wouldn't," he said at last. "However, I do have appearances to keep up, I can't just disappear for a month or my family and possibly Dumbledore will get suspicious."

"If that's the case I can create a portkey that you can use to move back and forth between your house and my mansion. Of course, that would mean that you will be around here for two months, rather than one. Is that acceptable?"

"Of course, thank you," said Harry.

"Do not mention it," Nicholas smiled, he was surprised to actually feel some old excitement at finding someone who may actually be intelligent enough to truly comprehend alchemy and maybe even surpass him and his wife.

"Very well then, we'll get started tomorrow," he announced. "I'll have my house elf, Nibs, show you to your room, I expect you to have the first chapter read by tomorrow."

As the house elf that Harry had first met showed him to his room, he began to fantasize about all of the things he would learn while under the guiding hand of someone who had been alive since before Harry's grandfather was even a twinkle in his grandfather's eye.

XoX

Recently I was told in a PM that I should probably not give back to back updates, so as to allow my readers to digest the first chapter



and review it. I don't know if I should do this or not, so I have decided to adopt a wait and see approach. I figured that if I get a lot of reviews the first day, it means that people have read my story and are ready for the next chapter. If I don't get very many, it probably means not as many people have read it yet, and thus, I should wait at least a day before updating.

I'll see how things go.

## Chapter 2: An Alchemical Problem

XoX

Harry towed himself off after taking a long shower to loosen his muscles from his work out. He entered the room that Nicholas Flamel had given to him and saw that a pair of clothes was already on his bed waiting for him. He took a moment to marvel at how efficient the house elves here were before putting the clothes on.

When he had first come to the Flamel estate via portkey, he had only had the clothes on his back with him. When Nicholas' wife Perennial found out, she had kidnapped Harry from his studying to take him clothes shopping. She had taken him to a custom outfitter where he had been measured from head to toe and had several dozen girls fussing over him as they tried to find out what clothes would look best on him.

Were he a teenager that had started puberty, he likely would have been in heaven, having all those girls fawning over him, telling him how cute he was, and giving him all sorts of compliments about him becoming a heart breaker when he got older. As it was, he had nearly died of embarrassment. He couldn't even understand why she had taken him, since he left each day to go back home anyways.

Nicholas had told him to just grin and bear it.

He had also ended up sleeping on the couch because Perennial had heard him.

Harry grabbed his chosen outfit of the day, a pair of dark forest green pants and shirt with a dark gray, almost black cloak that held the Potter Crest on the left shoulder in gold coloring. The crest had been added on by Perennial, who apparently had some talent in sowing charms. He had to admit, even if only to himself, that the outfitters really had good taste.

Minutes later, Harry found himself on the veranda where Nibs, the first house elf he had met, already had a breakfast of eggs, Bacon and French toast waiting for him. Already sitting at the table was a very beautiful and elegant woman with dark blond hair, blue eyes and an aristocratic face with high cheek bones, sipping tea as she read a French Newspaper called La Tribune. Despite being only a

few years younger than Nicholas, Perennial Flamel looked like she was in her early twenties.

"Mrs. Flamel," Harry greeted as he sat down at the table opposite of her. "How are you this morning?"

Perennial looked up at Harry with a slight smile. "Harry, what have I told you about calling me Mrs. Flamel?" she said chidingly. Unlike her husband, Perennial Flamel still enjoyed human contact and often went to the world outside of their mansion. One of the things Harry knew about her was she enjoyed teasing him, which had been readily apparent when the girls who had helped him find his outfit fussed over him.

"The same thing every other female adult in my life tells me," Harry replied as he piled up some food on his plate. "It would be disrespectful of me to call you by your first name with how kind you and Mr. Flamel are being in letting me stay here." He had been living with the Flamel's for nearly a week now, he would still go back to his relatives house in Surrey but that was only to keep up appearances for the Dursley's and Lisa.

"Unless, of course, they want you to call them that," Perennial shot back. "Then it's disrespectful of you not to do as they ask."

"Touché," Harry admitted as he continued to eat.

"I'll never understand how you two can get up so early," a voice said the entrance. The two turned to see a still sleepy Nicholas Flamel standing there yawning as he walked out onto the veranda. "Good morning, dear," he said as he kissed Perennial on the cheek and then sat down heavily in his chair.

A cup and plate appeared in front of him, the cup filled with steaming tea and the plate filled with a French breakfast of croissants with jam and butter. He took a sip of his tea as Harry and Perennial gave their own good mornings.

"So Harry," Nicholas said after having his fill of food. "How far along are you on that book?"

"Finished, sir," Harry leaned back in his seat. "It took a little longer than I expected, in order to understand the content I've had to

actually do work for each chapter." Alchemy was a chemical science and speculative philosophy aiming to achieve the transmutation of metals into gold, the discovery of a universal cure for disease, and the discovery of indefinitely prolonging life that had been created in what had become known as medieval times or the dark ages to muggles. A power or process of transforming something common into something special, otherwise known as transmutation. Harry had learned that alchemy was actually the bases for muggle's modern chemistry.

Nicholas Flamel snorted at hearing that reading a near six hundred page book had taken Harry longer then he had expected. The boy had been a sponge about everything that he had been teaching, within the first two days Harry had read the first book given to him and then came back for more. At first, Nicholas had been skeptical.

It was easy to understand why. An almost twelve year-old boy reading up on material that even some of the brightest minds would never be able to truly comprehend managing to finish within two days? The mere thought was absurd.

Yet he had done it. Flamel had tested Harry, giving him what would have been an impossible task for anyone that had not read and fully comprehended the words within the book. Harry had surprisingly ached it, not just that, he had completely blown away Flamel's expectations.

It had been after that moment that Nicholas realized just what he was dealing with. The boy was determined, motivated and had a natural genius that was mind boggling. As a minor experiment he had given Harry an IQ test, simply to see where the boy stood and had been shocked to see that the score easily blew many others out of the water.

Harry Potter had an IQ of over two hundred, well over two hundred. It was the kind of genius that Flamel realized only came once in a generation.

Since then he had worked Harry much harder then he would have originally, putting the boy through the paces at a rate that would make Harry at least an apprentice if not a journeyman in alchemy by the time he was done.

"Very well then," he said, "after breakfast, I want you to come down to the lab where we'll begin your next test."

"Yes sir," Harry said as he quickly finished eating and stood up. "I'll meet you there."

He made his way to his room, grabbing the book Nicholas had him read before walking towards the lab. Entering Harry levitated the book and placed it on the appropriate shelf, meanwhile he walked over to the ingredients and grabbed the vials and jars he would need for the test. He set each one down on the table and looked them over, sixteen grams of ammonium nitrate powder, five grams of finely ground zinc powder and three drops of hydrochloric acid.

"I see you already have the ingredients ready," said Nicholas as he entered, closing the door and walking over to the table.

"Yes," said Harry, grabbing a piece of chalk. "Now I just need to create the Transmutation circle to contain the power." Alchemy had been a very dangerous practice when it started out; many people had died due to the chemical reactions of the dangerous ingredients used in the process, or made some mistake when they were deconstructing the environment around them. In order to contain the reaction Merlin, the first wizard who was known to have used alchemy created the alchemical transmutation circle. The circle was very similar to Runes, relying on symbols drawn within a circle to contain and power the transmutation. Those who were extremely talented could actually use the circles to deconstruct and reconstruct the ground into anything they desired. It required a lot of memorization since different symbols were required for different transmutations, which was why most people weren't capable of using alchemy.

However, for someone like Harry, alchemy was a near perfect art for him. With his eidetic memory he could read every book and remember it perfectly, he only needed to hear Nicholas tell him something once and it would never be forgotten and once he could draw a symbol perfectly he would never truly need to practice for fear of getting rusty. Precise calculations, transmutation circles, everything he could learn was sucked into his mind like a sponge.

Harry quickly drew a perfect circle on the table, adding three triangles, the symbol for fire, that connected in the center of the

circle where he added an eight-pointed star. Next he placed the ammonium nitrate powder and finely ground zinc into the star, then placed the three drops of hydrolic acid. Finally, he placed his hands just outside of the circle on either side and channeled his magic.

Flames instantly lit up from the ingredients, roaring into a large fire that spread along the chalked lines before it consumed the entire circle.

"There!" Harry said cheerfully.

"Nicely done," said Nicholas, "I'm impressed, fire may not be the hardest element to create but it's obvious you have learned your lessons well. Your next lesson is going to be on repairing objects that are broken using alchemy. This has no real book, I will give you something that is broken, and you must research the object to find out what it's base chemicals are, then buy the materials in the market and fix the object."

"Ok," Harry said determinedly. "What is it I'm going to have to fix?"

"Hmmm," Nicholas looked around his lab before grinning, "come on."

"What?" Harry questioned before he was jerked off his feet by Flamel who began dragging him back to his room. They entered and Nicholas grabbed one of Harry's shirts, an expensive acromantula silk shirt in a dark green color. He then proceeded to rip it into several pieces.

"Hey! What the hell was that for!" demanded Harry, glaring at the much older man. That had been one of the new shirts Perennial had gotten for him.

"This is what you're going to fix," Nicholas said, as if the answer should have been obvious.

"But I – I thought I was going to use one of the items you have," Harry looked at his ripped shirt, finding out what acromantula silk was made of would be far harder then something like the grandfather clock the Flamel's had near the stairs by the front door.

"Now why would you think that?" asked Nicholas, smirking a little bit. "It's only right that you would use items that belong to you, that way if you mess up it only hurts you."

"You mean my pocket book," Harry grumbled before whipping out his wand, "Augmenti!"

"GAH!"

XoX

Harry sighed as he made his way down the streets of Paris; it had taken nearly two days of studying and tests to figure out the chemical makeup of his acromantula silk shirt, which was far longer than he had expected. Of course, that might have been partly because of the punishment he had been forced to do for smashing Nicholas into a wall from his overpowered augmenti charm.

The man had not been pleased, and had forced him to clean several of the unused rooms without magic. Considering the older male had ripped an expensive shirt to pieces, Harry felt his revenge had been worth it.

He found himself behind the Notre-Dame, looking at one of the walls, one that was different from the rest of them. He pulled out his mother's wand and drew a small symbol with it, watching as his wand carved a path of blue light wherever it went. When it was complete, the symbol hissed before sinking into the wall and then disappeared along with the wall itself. As Harry walked in, he found it somewhat interesting that the entrance to Ruelle de Magique, the French equivalent of Diagon Alley, was located inside of a historically significant building.

While the place may have been used for the same purposes as Diagon Alley, their looks couldn't have been more different. The British, for some reason, seem to have stayed in the middle ages when designing their architecture; the buildings were all very basic and made from aged bricks that gave the whole Alley a mid-evil look. In contrast, Ruelle de Magique looked new; all of the buildings had an odd combination of renaissance and modern architecture. There were café's that looked like someone had taken them straight from the muggle world, the shops looked brand new, and, while the

Gringotts bank looked the same as the one in Britain, nothing else did. He actually liked this alley much more than the one back home.

Putting a glamour charm over his scar Harry made his way around the street, looking for the shop that Nicholas told him about. Nearly an hour later he was cursing the man for not telling him where to find the shop. He was sure this was another part of his punishment that Flamel had planned.

His stomach growled, and Harry realized he had been walking around for a few hours. He decided to get some food before continuing his search and made his way into the first restaurant he saw.

The restaurant was small, housing only several tables, a few booths and a small bar. It looked like one of those walk-in restaurants, since Harry did not see a Maitre d', which would usually be the first person guests would interact with when entering a restaurant. Still, the place was much cleaner than the Leaky Cauldron and everything looked exactly as it did on the outside, brand new.

Harry made his way towards one of the booths so that he could look out the window and watch the people go past while he waited. A few minutes later a young woman who looked to be around eighteen with brown hair and a pretty smile came up and greeted him.

"Bonjour," she said, pausing for a moment when he turned his head to look at her. "Où puis-je vous servir aujourd'hui?" she asked, switching to English once she realized he was English. Though she had a heavy French accent.

Harry smiled at her and made his order in French, "(I would like to have your steak and chips and a order of...) J'aimerais avoir votre steak-frites et comme boisson..." he looked over the beverages, most of the drinks they had were wines and he didn't really feel like drinking that, nor was he craving tea at the moment. That was when he noticed they actually had some muggle soft drinks. "Du coke," he said at last.

The girl's smile seemed to get larger when she heard him speak in French, obviously he had earned some points for using the native tongue. "(Your order will be up in just a bit)Ce sera prêt dans un instant," she said in French before walking off.



Turning his head back to look out of the window, Harry watched the people walking past. While Diagon Alley and this place were very different in how they looked, the hustle and bustle of the two wizarding towns were the same.

Fifteen minutes later the pretty waitress came back with his order. "Bon appetite," she said as she set the plate down in front of him and then placed his drink on the table.

"Merci," Harry said before he began to eat slowly. When he finished, Harry spent a few minutes just relaxing and letting his food settle before leaving the money and a generous tip on the table. Standing up, he left the small restaurant and began to walk around again, looking for the shop that would sell him ingredients for his alchemy.

When he had traveled what seemed to be the entire alleyway twice he decided it may be better to just ask for directions. Walking up to the closest person, an older man with a graying mustache, Harry said, "(Excuse me? Do you know where I can find a store for Alchemy ingredients?) Excusez-moi, mais est-ce que vous sauriez où je peux trouver un magasin qui vend les ingrédients pour l'Alchimie?"

The man looked at him with an appraising eye for several seconds before speaking, "(You are an alchemist?) Tu n'es pas un peu jeune pour apprendre l'alchimie?"

"Oui."

"(A little young to be learning alchemy, are you not?) Un peu jeune pour être l'apprentissage alchimie, vous n'êtes pas?"

Harry felt a mild amount of irritation at someone questioning him but didn't let it show; he was very young but getting into alchemy after all. "(Age has nothing to do with talent) Le talent n'a rien à voir avec l'âge," he replied, "(Now do you know where I can find an Alchemy shop) Alors est-ce que vous savez où je pourrai trouver un magasin d'Alchimie?"

The man let out a mild chuckle and said, "(Just making sure that you are kid, no need to get so defensive. Go to the other side of alley of magic and you will find a small alley, go in the alleyway and watch

for a workshop which seems abandoned. Its glamoured, most of the people do not notice it, would not want others who know nothing of alchemy get their hands on hazardous ingredients after all.) C'est juste pour être sûr que tu en sois un, petit, pas besoin de t'énerver. Va de l'autre côté de l'allée magique, et tu y trouvera un petit passage. Entres-y et cherche un magasin qui à l'air abandonné. Il y a un charme que la plupart des gens ne remarquent pas. On ne voudrait pas que ceux qui n'y connaissent rien en alchimie découvrent des ingrédients dangereux après tout."

"(You are an alchemist, aren't you) Vous êtes un alchimiste, n'est-ce pas." said Harry – it wasn't a question. The man merely smiled before walking off. Seeing as it was the best lead he had found on the store all day, he followed the man's directions and came upon the abandoned shop just like he had been told he would.

The shop really did look abandoned and unused, especially when compared to the rest of Ruelle de Magique. The walls were cracked and looked like they were in great need of repair, the windows were stained and dirty as if no one had cleaned the place since it was built, and the entire place just gave off this feel that there hadn't been a living soul near the shop for several hundred years.

His eyes took all of this in during the few seconds he stood in front, memorizing the entire look of the building before he walked inside. What he found inside was a very pristine looking store with several shelves filled ingredients, some that Harry knew about and knew were rare, and others that he had never seen before. The place looked like every alchemist's wet dream.

"(Can I help you find something) Puis-je vous aider?"

At the sound of the voice, Harry turned around and looked up to see a square jawed man wearing a black cloak with gold fastenings looking him up and down with a small frown. "Oui," the raven haired youth replied, pulling out a small note from his cloak and handing it to the man. "(I have need of these ingredients, if you have them.) J'ai besoin de ces ingrédients, si vous les avez."

"Hmmm," the Frenchman looked over the list of ingredients, "(If i did not know that I would like to say everything better than you are trying to create acromantula with silk.) Si je n'en savais pas plus, je dirai que vous essayer de créer de la soie d'acromantulas."

"(I am) C'est le cas," Harry said, getting the man to look back at him. "(My professor ripped one of my shirts and told me to the repair using alchemy, this are the chemical ingredients of acromantula with silk.) Mon professeur a déchiré un de mes T-shirt an m'a dit de le réparer en utilisant l'alchimie, ce sont les composants chimiques de la soie d'acromantula."

The man's eyes seemed to gain a light of respect as he realized that Harry really did know alchemy. "(We have some of these ingredients) Nous avons certains de ces ingrédients," he said at last. "(However, we do not have beryllium) Toutefois, nous n'avons pas le béryllium."

"(I see, do you know where I can get some) Je vois. Est-ce que vous savez où je peux en obtenir?"

"Oui," the man said before walking away. "(Let us set the rest of those ingredients before we do anything else however.) Allons cependant d'abord récupérer le reste de ces ingrédients d'abord." Harry followed the man as he looked at the list and walked around the store; occasionally he would grab a jar, a box or a vial that held the ingredients he needed for his alchemy. When they had all sixteen ingredients needed, the man led Harry to a counter in the back that held a new set of advanced looking scales.

The man would measure out each of the ingredients necessary and place them on the scales, occasionally re-measuring when the amount didn't match what was on the list. When he finished he would place each of the ingredients in a small sack and tied it with a small, gold rope. Only one item was measured using a different method, a reddish-brown liquid that was placed in a small vial with an unbreakable charm on it.

"Here we are," he said when he finished, grabbing the sacks and carrying them over to the register. Harry followed, and the man began to ring him up. "(Two miligrams per of bromite, 15 grams of calcium, five grams of carbon, two grams of cesium, six grams of gallium, ten grams of lithium, of 11 grams of plutonium, a gram of magnese, twenty-two miligrams per potassium, two grams of nickel, three grams of radium, four grams of sodium, eight grams of slilicon, six grams of sulfur, a milligram of tungsten and seven grams of zinc.) Deux miligrammes de bromite, quinze grammes de calcium,

cinq grammes de carbone, deux grammes de césium, six grammes de gallium, dix grammes de lithium, de 11 grammes de plutonium, un gramme de magnese, vingt-deux miligrammes de potassium, deux grammes de nickel, trois grammes de radium, quatre grammes de sodium, huit grammes de silicium, six grammes de soufre, un milligramme de tungstène et sept grammes de zinc."

The man went over the calculations in his head and then gave Harry the price, "(It will cost 50 Swiss francs.) Ça vous coûtera 50 francs suisse." Harry nodded and pulled his Gringotts pouch out of his robes and then pulled out the money, setting it on the counter for the man to count.

"(It looks like everything is in order) Tout a l'air d'être dans l'ordre," the man said at last, handing over the sacks and vials. Harry grabbed them and placed them in a small pocket in his robe that had expansion charms placed on it.

"(So do you know where I can obtain some Beryllium) Alors est-ce que vous savez où je peux trouver du Béryllium?" asked Harry.

"Oui," The square jawed man paused for a moment. "(You can get Beryllium at a Muggle store called Carrefour. They sell Muggle cameras, which contain 16 grams of Beryllium. You will, of course, need to break it down first, but I would guess that if you are already on object repair, then you must also know how to deconstruct items.) Alors quand vous quittez la Ruelle Magique, prenez un taxi pour le Louvre et tournez Rue de Rivoli. Le magasin moldu est juste là, vous ne pouvez pas le rater." the way he said that made it sound like a question, but Harry knew that he felt the answer should be obvious.

"(It was one of the first things my teacher (It was one of the first things my teacher taught me) C'était la première chose que j'ai appris," Harry said, suspecting the man was testing his knowledge on the subject to ensure his claims of learning alchemy were legitimate.

The man nodded in approval and gave directions, "(Now, when you leave Magic Lane, take a taxi to the Louvre, and then turn on Rue de Rivoli. The Muggle shop will be right there, you can't miss it) Alors quand vous quittez la Ruelle Magique, prenez un taxi pour le

Louvre et tournez Rue de Rivoli. Le magasin moldu est juste là, vous ne pouvez pas le rater."

"Merci," Harry said with a small bow. He left the store and a few minutes later was walking out from the wall of Notre-Dame. Entering muggle Paris, Harry took off his robes and pulled out a wallet filled with muggle money before pocketing the cloak in an endless bag that he placed in a pocket of his jeans. As he walked out into the main street he hailed down a taxi and walked over to the open window.

"(I would like to be taken to the Louvre) Je voudrai aller au Louvre," Harry said.

The man looked at Harry incredulously, obviously wondering what a kid his age was doing walking around alone. "(Very well) Très bien," he said at last, "(It will cost fifty Swiss Franks) Il en coûtera cinquante francs suisses."

Harry nodded and handed the surprised man the correct amount of money. He opened the door and climbed in, sitting down and buckling his seat belt as he felt the cab start to move. The trip was not that long, about fifteen minutes in total before Harry stepped out of the taxi and found himself looking at the Louvre.

During the forty-three-year reign of Philippe Auguste (1180–1223), the power and influence of the French monarchy grew considerably, both inside and outside the kingdom. In 1190, a rampart was built around Paris, which was Europe's biggest city at the time. To protect the capital from the Anglo-Norman threat, the king decided to reinforce its defenses with a fortress, which came to be known as the Louvre. It was built to the west of the city, on the banks of the Seine.

The Louvre was a successive architectural metamorphoses that had dominated central Paris since the late 12th century. Built on the city's western edge, the original structure was gradually engulfed as the city grew. The dark fortress of the early days was transformed into the modernized dwelling of François I and, later, the sumptuous palace of the Sun King, Louis XIV.

Harry had always been a bit of a history buff, he enjoyed learning of the events and stories that were held in the passages of time. Many

people did not understand the significance of history, but Harry had always enjoyed learning of the past, seeing how things progressed from back then to become one they are now. Which was why he found it unfortunate that he did not have any time to visit a piece of history as magnificent as the Louvre, which he knew had even more history inside its walls.

He turned around and began walking until he found the Rue de Rivoli and then began walking east along the sidewalk. Finding Carrefour was a simple affair, he just had to look for the large sign that told him he was at the right place.

The doors slid open when he stepped on the sensors, one of the muggles more innovative technologies, and he stepped in and looked around. The store was set up like any other convenience store he had ever been in, all areas were divided by category: clothes, food, electronics, furniture and so on. He made his way to the electronics section where he found a clerk manning a station behind a circular-ish, glass table.

"Excusez-moi," Harry said to the blond haired man after he finished helping with another customer.

The blond man turned around and gave Harry an odd look that, though he had been growing used to by now, still annoyed him. He had been getting this look for years now, the one that said 'what the hell is a kid doing on his own'. Even though he had long since gotten used to them though, the looks still bothered the young boy who was more independent than some adults.

The man snapped out of whatever he was thinking and gave Harry a slightly condescending smile. "(Hello there, you lost kid) Salut gamin, tu es perdu?" he asked.

Harry felt his right eye twitched and had to resist the urge to punch this man in the face. "Non," He responded in a somewhat snappish voice. "(I'm not lost, I was hoping I could buy a Camera) Je n'en suis pas perdu, j'espérais que je pourrais acheter un appareil photo."

"(Really) Vraiment?" the man looked at him with a frown, but that smile quickly came back. "(Camera's are quite expensive kid. Do you think you have enough money to buy one?) Les appareils

photos content plutôt cher petit. Tu es sûr que tu as assez d'argent pour en acheter un?"

Harry was quickly coming to hate this man. Still, he told himself that resorting to violence was beneath him and merely pulled out his muggle wallet, opening it to show it filled to the brim with French banknotes, all of them fifties and one hundreds.

While the man gaped Harry smirked, "(I think this should be enough to cover my expenses, don't you) Je pense que j'ai assez, pas vous?"

All the blond man could do was nod.

"(Now how about we get down to business) Et si nous nous y mettions maintenant?" Harry asked rhetorically as he looked at the cameras. Finding the cheapest one he pointed at it, "(I want that one, right there) Je veux celle là, juste là."

"(Uh, right) Euh, d'accord," the man unlocked one of the drawers under the glass case and pulled out a box of the camera. He set it down on the counter and said, "(You will need to pay for it up front) Vous aurez besoin de le payer à l'avant."

"(Right) D'accord," Harry grabbed the box and spun around, walking off. He ended up waiting in line for nearly a dozen minutes, there were only two registers open and quite a few people buying. By the time Harry had paid for his camera and left, it was starting to get dark out.

He began walking around the street, looking for a good spot to apparate, someplace quiet where there were no muggles to spot him. As he continued walking he entered a section that had next to no life, at least none that he could see, the Louvre had already closed, probably during the time he was in the store. He walked up to it and was about to begin looking for some kind of alley or alcove that he could hide in for when he apparated when he stopped.

There was blood on the handle of the museum doors.

He walked up to the door and looked at the handle, the blood was black and looked coagulated, meaning the person it belonged to

was dead. A small frown came to his face as his brows creased in thought, something odd was up.

Pushing, the door opened and Harry walked in, all the lights were out. Though he could see much better than an average human thanks to some of the abilities from his Panther form transferring over to his human form, it was still too dark for his taste. Accessing his inner animal, he transformed into a black panther. If his form were capable of it, he would have grinned; everything was so clear now.

There hadn't really been a chance for him to use his animagus form before now; he had gone out in it occasionally but never for long. He was pleased to have found a use for it so soon.

Prowling along his eyes roamed the room he was in, it was curious that no alarms had gone off but when he hopped into the front desk he realized why. All the electricity had been cut, including the alarms and likely the cameras that he knew should be keeping an eye on the place. The thought of what someone could be doing here that would require them to cut off the power was troubling, but he pushed it aside and continued on.

He soon entered one of the halls and began to prowl around, keeping his nose low to the ground. He stopped when his eyes picked up a black glint a little ways away, and when he got near it his nose caught the scent of blood.

His first thoughts on the blood being coagulated were right. As Harry sniffed the blood his instincts screamed that the blood smelled dead; it was the only thing his animal instincts could conclude. And his human side agreed.

Continuing on, Harry began to hear voices coming from one of the rooms – no, not voices, screams. Female screams. They were not screams of pain, but of outright agony. Whoever was responsible for them was suffering a great deal.

Bounding off Harry let his strong legs carry him along far faster than he could hope to be as a human. The screams abruptly cut off and Harry pushed himself even harder until he found himself looking into a door that was slightly cracked open.



Inside he found a scene that disgusted him. Two men, wearing what looked like some kind of religious uniform, a dark grayish-white tunic with a red cross on the back, were standing with their backs turned to him. Judging from the red cross he could assume they were catholic, or at least belonged to one of the many christian sects. It was hard to tell, having never been religious himself.

That wasn't what disgusted him, however. What did was the young woman in front of them who was bound to a cross, bleeding so heavily that he could hardly see her skin underneath. She was either dead or unconscious, he couldn't tell, though the blood that was slicked across her was the same coagulated blood he had seen on the floor so he suspected she was dead. Of course these thoughts brought up another one. Blood didn't coagulate like it did unless the person who died had been dead for several days at least. This girl had been screaming just a few seconds ago. So how could the blood have gotten that way?

He was unsure what to do and fighting with the desire to throw up when he heard one of the men speak.

"(Damn! I can't believe she died on us!) Damn! Non posso credere che lei svenuta," he said in an irritated voice, Harry vaguely noted that the he was speaking in Italian. It was then that the moment began to move even more downhill as Harry heard the man's next words, "(She may be an abomination, but I must admit that this is a beautiful piece of ass.) lei può essere un abominio, ma devo ammettere che questo è un bel pezzo di culo."

"(Hey, What are you doing?) Ehi, cosa stai facendo?" asked the other. It was hard to make out in the light, but thanks to his enhanced eyesight he could see that the other man had his nose wrinkled in disgust. "(Are you willing to commit a sin for a small pleasure?) Siete disposti a commettere un peccato per un piccolo piacere?"

"(Relax, I'll make this quick) relax, farò questo resoconto." Harry saw the mans hands began to fiddle with his belt. Disgusted that the man was not only about to rape the girl, but also didn't seem to care that she was dead, Harry decided that he was not going to let this prick violate the girl after having obviously just spent hours torturing her.

He slammed the door open with his paws and barged in with a loud roar, both the men looked startled and turned only to see Harry jump on the man who had been about to drop his trousers. Harry felt the blood gush into his mouth as he bit down on the mans collar bone, the wound would ensure he passed out from blood loss within a few seconds but would not die from bleeding out. The artery he had hit would scab over long before that.

He would have killed them, but considering he did not know the whole situation, nor whether or not doing so would bring him unwanted trouble, had decided not to.

"Elirecho!" the other man yelled, pulling out his gun and aiming it at Harry. However, Harry had seen the act and jumped away, leaving Elirecho to slump to the floor where he passed out a few seconds later.

"(Devil! Where are you!) Diavolo! dove sei!" the man shouted, looking around frantically. He didn't even see the red bolt of energy that hit him in the back before he too slumped too the ground.

Harry ran up to where the girl was on the cross and pulled out the stakes that were binding her hands; he caught her as she fell on top of him – heedless of the copious amounts of blood that slicked his entire front – and pulled her down to the ground as he sat down. Pulling out his mother's wand, he began to run several medical scans over her, they were very basic and wouldn't do much other then tell him if she was alive or not. What he found out was disheartening but not unexpected. The girl was dead.

He felt his shoulders slump a little, he may not have known this girl, but no one deserved what happened to her. His eyes traveled over her form to see if he couldn't find any identifying marks that would help him discover who she was so that he could find her parents and at least inform them of the girls death. She looked to be about fourteen, maybe a little older. She was very pretty from what Harry could see, a gentle, aristocratic face with a small, cute button nose, dark ruby red red lips, and a perfect female figure. Harry figured that if he were a few years older, he likely would have tried getting her as a girlfriend.

What skin he could see was very pale, almost translucent, though he chalked it up to all of the blood loss she must have suffered.

Seeing all of the blood that covered her, decided that the least he could do was get her cleaned up and give her the respect of a proper burial.

Harry cast a cleaning charm to rid the girl of all the blood.

It didn't work.

Harry frowned as he tried casting the myriad of cleaning charms he knew to try and cleanse the red, life giving liquid off, but nothing he did seemed to have any affect. As his frown deepened he tried to figure out why his charms weren't working. Did cleaning blood require a different charm? Or was there something in the blood that negated his magic?

Sighing Harry closed his eyes and cast a basic scourgify again. This time he worked on feeling the magic as he cast it. He felt it move towards the still form of the girl, like a small wave before it caressed the sandy shore. When the magic hit the girl, he felt the charm begin to take affect, then he felt it shift. His mouth dropped as he realized what was happening, the magic from his spell was actually being absorbed into the blood!

Opening his eyes, the young wizard frowned at this development. He had never heard of blood that could absorb magic. Though he had admittedly only heard of blood magic in passing, magic that used ones own blood to power it, normally through the use of runes and powerful incantations. However, Harry suspected this was different than standard blood magic.

It also meant he would have to clean her by hand, not a very enticing prospect. Were it not for the fact that he had already killed, even if his last sight of Quirrel was no where near as gruesome as this, he probably would have lost his lunch at the thought of what he had to do.

Waving a hand Harry conjured a cloth and then a bucket, after that he cast a simple augmenti charm with his mother's wand to fill the bucket with water.

Placing the rag in the bucket he began to wash the blood off of the girls body, be careful to treat it with respect and be gentle even though he knew she was dead. As he did his eyes noticed that she

had several burns along her chest and torso, they looked like they were in the shape of a cross. He also noticed how the skin along the edges of the burns was blackened, it looked unnatural and he couldn't help but wonder how he had gotten them.

He finished cleaning, and despite the morbid situation he found himself trying not to get embarrassed as he cleaned the two areas that males his age should not touch. As he removed his hand after he finished cleaning between her inner thighs, the girl's own hand lashed out unexpectedly, grabbing onto his forearm with surprising strength. Harry yelped as he pulled away, yanking his arm out of the girl's grip.

His eyes widened as he looked at the girl, surprised to see her eyes open, albeit they were half-lidded and looked dull. Her hand trembled as she tried to raise it from where it had fallen after he yanked his from her grip. Green eyes met blue, and then he saw something that he had not noticed before, two fangs protruding from her mouth, and instantly knew why the blood had coagulated so soon.

This girl wasn't human.

She was a vampire.

"(W-Who are you) C-chi sei?" her voice came out in a haggard, pain-filled whisper.

"Harry," he replied dumbly, trying to figure out what to do. Aside from being quite surprised to meet a vampire, he was also shocked that this girl was still alive after having lost so much blood. While he knew very little about vampires in general, he knew they needed blood to survive, and considering the amount he found covering her, assumed she had lost at least her weight in blood.

"(Those to men who were chasing me... what happened to them) Gli uomini, queglii uomini che erano dietro di me ... quello che è successo a loro?"

"(They are... indisposed of) La loro...attualmente dorme," Harry said after a while. His Italian was a bit spotty, he had not studied it as much as he had his French. But he could understand it well enough and could speak it decently enough to be considered somewhat

fluent. The girl looked at him and her mouth worked for several moments before her eyes rolled up into the back of her head and she passed out again.

Harry crawled forward and looked the girl over, now that he knew she was a vampire he realized he couldn't check for vitals to see if she was, alive? Not quite dead? He wasn't sure what to classify a vampire since in all technicality they were dead. Maybe undead? Whatever the case, he was starting to wish he had not skipped reading the part about 'dark creatures' in his defense book in exchange for more powerful spells.

He waved a hand over the girl as he stood up, levitating her body into the air. With her blood no longer coating her body like a set of clothing, he could now use his magic on the girl. Another wave and he conjured a plain, make-shift robe to cover her still nude form. After that he slid his hands under her body, releasing his hold over his magic, letting her drop into his arms with one hand under her knees and the other under her shoulder. The next second Harry and the girl he was carrying disappeared with a small pop.

XoX

The next thing Harry knew he was kneeling on the floor of the Flamel estate gasping for breath; he could feel his reserves being drained to only one-fourth of what they normally were. He had not realized apparating more than one person would be so tiring.

There was a soft crack next to him and Harry looked up to see nibs looking at him and the girl in his arms.

"Nibs," Harry gasped, blinking a bit to some focus into his eyes. "I need you to prepare a room for an injured person and get Mrs. Flamel."

The house elf took one look at the girl in his arms before saying, "Of course, Master Harry."

XoX

About ten minutes later Harry found himself sitting on a chair the bed that the vampire girl he had rescued was laying in. Perennial

and Nicholas were standing on the other side, Perennial was running a wand over the vampire's form.

"She's not...well, she's dead, but her soul has not left this plane," she said at last. "She'll need a lot of rest, and likely a lot of blood in order to regain her full health. The scars on her chest and stomach are going to be permanent, however."

"How was it that I sent you on a simple errand to gather ingredients for alchemy, and you come back with an injured female vampire?" asked Nicholas, the expression on his face somewhere between exasperated and amused.

"Well..." Harry scratched the back of his head before he decided to just tell them what happened, from his time in the alley, getting the camera from the muggle convenient store, finding the coagulated blood on the door, his run in with the vampire being tied to a cross and his rescue of her from two people.

"Sounds like religious soldiers of the Vatican," Nicholas murmured. "They're the only ones who know about certain things in the magical world, it does not surprise me at all that they were hunting a vampire."

"They were speaking Italian," Harry said, trying to be helpful. "Isn't the Vatican in Italy? Why would they be all the way over here in France?"

"The Vatican are a bunch of religious fanatics," Perennial answered, sounding slightly disgusted. "It's not so far-fetched to believe they would chase what they considered an abomination into another country to do their duty."

Harry frowned as he looked down at the girl, it must have been terrible, having to run so far from her home in an attempt to escape death for reasons that she had no decision in. He couldn't imagine what she must have went through. "I can't understand why someone would think she could be an abomination," he said. "Aren't vampires people too? It's not like they can help what happened to them, they can't change how they're born."

Nicholas and Perennial looked at each other with a knowing glance.

"It's just the way some people are," Nicholas answered after a while, looking back at Harry. "There are always people who hold prejudice against others for being different."

"Don't I know it," Harry murmured, barely loud enough for the two to catch.

"Harry?" asked Perennial.

Harry stood up. "I'm going to fix up my shirt that Nicholas ruined," he said. "Will you have someone let me know when she wakes up?"

"Of course," Perennial said, wondering about the abrupt change in topic.

Harry nodded and walked out. His mind was on the vampire he had rescued and the soldiers he had injured. Harry was coming to realize that the muggle world had just as many problems as the wizarding one. He knew this of course, but had only really been subject to the Dursley's abject hatred of him, which was in part a magical problem. This was too of course, but he was beginning to see something that others either couldn't see, or didn't want to.

The muggle and magical worlds, despite being separate, were still closely connected. Enough so that religious fanatics like those Vatican soldiers knew enough about the magical world to be aware of Vampires, and in all likelihood other creatures as well.

And if they knew about the so-called 'dark creatures' of the wizarding world. How long would it be before people discovered the existence of wizards?

XoX

The next few days that followed saw a slight shift in Harry's schedule, he still woke up early, still did his exercise, but now he had to incorporate going to Ruelle de Magique in order to get ingredients for his alchemy and spending his time off in the vampire girls room taking care of her. Due to his feeling responsible for the girl he had rescued, Harry had not gone back to Privet drive in several days. He knew that Lisa would not be happy with him, and he would be forced to come up with an excuse for his absence. But he could not in good conscience leave while the mysterious vampire

was in such bad condition. Nicolas Flamel had told him that he would let her stay until she recovered, but after that Harry would be responsible for her.

In concordance with this he had Perennial teach him the spells she used to check to see if a vampire was in good health, relatively speaking, and was the one who would make sure she was getting some blood inside of her (he would feed her with blood replenishment potions that had some of his blood in the mix due to the fact that blood potions wouldn't work for vampires without real blood) since human food did nothing for vampires. When he wasn't making sure the young girl was comfortable, Harry was sitting at her bedside reading his alchemy books.

It was during one of those days where the young vampire had woken up.

XoX

Harry finished channeling his magic into the transmutation circle and watched as the large grandfather clock morphed and repaired itself. He was starting to get good at this; so far, aside from his shirt, he had managed to repair one of the large canopy beds from one of the empty rooms and now the grandfather clock that was stationed at the front door. At the very least, Nicholas commented on how well he was learning.

"Excellent job, Harry," he said as he walked around the clock, studying it to make sure there were no defects from the transmutation. "Everything looks exactly as it was; you're getting very good at this."

"Thank you, sir," Harry said.

"Your almost done with this level," Nicholas continued, "next we'll begin the last set level and if you pass that, you'll be considered an apprentice in alchemy." When a person was studying alchemy under a teacher, they went by the term student. However, once the teacher deemed a student ready, they would give said student a test that required the use of all the knowledge gained thus far. After that, if the student was successful, they would be considered an apprentice, the lowest rank among alchemists.



"What is the next level sir?" asked Harry.

"Well, so far you have transmuted elements and repaired objects, the next step is to transmute one material into another," Nicholas told Harry. "I'm going to give you one more test and then I'll start you on transmuting one metal into an entirely different metal. But that won't be until your last week here."

It was almost a surprise for Harry that he had only been more or less living with the Flamels for about one month and three weeks; so much had happened that made the time spent feel much longer.

"Very well, in that case I'll clean up here and get started on the next chapter," Harry said as he began cleaning the area he had been using for his alchemy. Nicolas walked out, pondering the enigma that the raven haired boy presented while said boy was cleaning. When finished, Harry also made his way out of the room.

Walking up the stairs and down a hall, Harry stopped in front of a door, twisting the handle and opening it. He walked straight in and shut the door before turning his eyes on the room's sole occupant. The female vampire he rescued was still unconscious, though she looked much better, relatively speaking. Her skin was still pale, and she was still cold, but considering she was technically dead that didn't mean much.

However, her skin now had a slightly unearthly glow that Perennial told him all vampires had, something about how it increased their sensuality in order to seduce the humans they preyed upon. Her lips were also a healthy blood red color and despite having not moved at all, the spells he had used to scan her showed she was mostly healed up.

He went through his usual routine of fluffing the vampire's pillow and making sure she was comfortable; it would have looked odd for anyone else to see an eleven, almost twelve year old boy to be looking after a vampire. However, Harry had gained a slight desire to help others who were in need thanks to his combat training, an odd paradox considering hand-to-hand was originally designed for killing.

When he finished, Harry sat down on the chair he had pulled up next to the bed and grabbed the book he left on the nightstand. He came

in so often that there was simply no point in taking the book to his room anymore.

Flipping the book open to where he had placed the page holder last, he began to read on the next step of alchemy, transmuting one material into another. It was during this time that the vampire decided to wake up.

A low, slightly rasping moan caused Harry to look over at the vampire to see her eyes fluttering a little. He placed his page holder in the book and set it back on the nightstand, then turned back to the waking young woman.

Her eyes fluttered open and Harry saw that they were a very piercing blue and seemed to glow slightly. He watched as they looked around, before landing on him. Hoping to keep her from freaking out he gave her a calm smile.

"Ciao," he said in Italian. It was slightly halting; he had not studied as much Italian as he had French, but he would still be considered fluent in it. "(How are you feeling) Come ti senti?"

The woman looked at him for a moment with slightly half-lidded eyes, it seemed as if she was trying to place where she had seen him. It only took a moment before the memory returned.

"You're the one who rescued me, aren't you?" she said, making it sound almost like a question. It was also in English, though her accent was even more heavily Italian than Celestina's. "I remember you now, you were with me when I woke up from..." she trailed off and gave a light shiver, remembering what had happened to her.

"Yes, I saved you from those Vatican people," Harry said, causing her to turn back to him. "Do you remember what happened before I got there?"

"Those men were a secret religious cult of the Vatican," she said, closing her eyes for a moment. A pained grimace crossed her face, as if remembering her encounter with him. A few seconds later, she opened her eyes again. "They are specially trained to hunt vampires. My family had been having its annual get together when they attacked. I barely managed to escape with my life in the confusion."

"You live in Italy right?" he asked, getting a nod. "How did you get all the way to France?"

"Portkey," she said, looking at him for a moment before deciding to trust him, he had saved her after all, and it was clear he was taking care of her when he could just as easily have given her to the Vatican. She held her hand to him and Harry saw a slight shimmer before a ring appeared on her finger.

"This ring is an emergency portkey," she continued, "it takes me to a secret hideout here in France." A sigh escaped her lips, "they somehow managed to follow me, and I was already injured."

"And so you escaped into the Louvre," Harry said, nodding his head a little. That answered his question, but now he had more. Like, how those men had found her. As far as he could see they were muggles, and thus it should have been impossible to track her down after she had portkeyed to France. That they had meant they had help, whether willing or unwilling remained to be seen, however.

"Actually, the Louvre is my hideout," she said with a small smirk. "I had gone out to see if I could find a way to get into contact with my family when they found me. I tried to lose them by going inside of the Louvre and using one of the secret passages out, but they found me before I could use it." While Harry turned to gape at her, she placed her hands behind her and pushed herself into a sitting position. She then studied him for several long minutes, her eyes trailing up and down. Finally, they landed on his scar.

"You're Harry Potter," she said, surprised that the person who saved her life was the-boy-who-lived.

Harry sighed to himself. "You know, I have no clue how I'm supposed to introduce myself when all people have to do is look at my scar."

The girl giggled, and Harry shivered at the sound; it was doing something weird to his body, sending tingles down his spine and giving his arm goosebumps.

"But it must be nice being so famous," she said.

"You mean a pain in the arse," he shot back. "Do you know how annoying it is to have people stare at you like some kind of circus freak everywhere you go?"

The girl laughed, causing shivers to run all over his body at the soft, tinkling sound.

"It's not funny," he grumbled, trying to shake himself out of the strange feeling her laughter was doing to him. He wished for the life of him he knew what was causing it.

"Sorry," she said, waving her hand in the air. "Most people your age would love to be so famous, you have to admit its kind of amusing."

Harry sighed, but then a smile made its way to his face. "I suppose it is," he said at last. He held out his hand, "so...what's your name?"

The vampire girl looked at him for several seconds before daintily placing her hand in it. "It's Angeline."

XoX

So this is my only real OC. I normally dislike using OC's since I feel Harry Potter has enough ready made OC's due to the fact that Rowling never actually bothers to flesh out any of her characters aside from a small few. However I have an important roll for Angeline to play in this story and no one else to play it. Thus I am putting aside from general dislike for OC's.

So, my translations are spotty at best. I used Google Translations (big surprise there) so I don't know how accurate they are. If anyone finds out they're wrong and has the corrections, please be sure to send them to me and I'll fix them up.

## Chapter 3: Vampire Princess

XoX

Harry wiped the sweat from his face as he continued working on his circle, it was far bigger than any of the other ones he did before. It was a large circle with symbols that went around the mid circumference of the circle. In the very center of the circle was another circle with a six-pointed star that had the points just touching the circle. Sticking straight up in the center of the star was a small pipe made of steel.

Placing his hands just outside of the circle Harry began channeling his magic, the area around the pole began to spark and Harry watched as the metal started to bend and morph, small globs melted off the side. It looked like it was becoming a liquid.

He could feel the drain on his magic far more than he had before, transmuting metal was apparently very difficult and tiring. Still, he felt like he was getting closer to accomplishing the task, he could see the metal beginning to change, the color going from silver to a light copper color. Just a few more seconds.

There was only a second of time to react as he saw the transmutation stop and spark red. Harry jumped back just in time to ensure he didn't get himself injured when the entire circle went up in flames. Standing up from where he had jumped Harry looked at the now ruined circle with shock, he had done everything right he was sure of it. Harry had checked his work before he did the transmutation so he knew that everything had been right. So what went wrong?

"HAHAHA!" Harry growled as he turned to Angeline, who was laughing at him. She was doing a lot better since she woke up, enough so that she could spend her time following him nearly everywhere he went. In the past two days he had learned quite a bit about her. One of the things he learned, was that she loved to tease him when he failed at something.

"It's not funny!" Harry shouted.

"Yes...it... yes it is," Angeline gasped as she continued to laugh, this went on until a more pained gasp escaped her and went down on a

knee coughing. Bringing a hand to her mouth the young vampiriess coughed up some blood.

"Damn it," Harry said as he rushed to Angeline while she fell to her knees, one hand on the ground to hold her up as the other went to her mouth. "You need to take it easy," he knelt down and gently rubbed her back as he pulled out his mother's wand with his other hand. Conjuring a piece of cloth he pulled Angeline's hand away from her mouth and began to wipe the blood off.

"I'm not used to being so weak," Angeline muttered as she let Harry wipe the blood from her mouth. The fourteen year old Vampire leaned into his touch a little and sighed. It was an act that went mostly unnoticed by Harry.

"Yeah, yeah," Harry muttered as he finished wiping her mouth and vanished the cloth. "You're a tough all-powerful vampire and all that. Even vampires take time to heal."

"I know that," she muttered as Harry placed his arm around his shoulder and placed one of his own around her waist. "It's just that I've never been injured before, not like this anyways."

"Well how many times has a fanatical cult attacked you before, hmm?"

Angeline sighed, "just the one."

"Exactly," Harry began leading Angeline through a corridor. "It doesn't matter how tough you vampires are, you still have to take time to heal like everyone else."

Harry slid the door to the veranda open and moved to set Angeline down on a chair and sat down himself. A few moments later a plate appeared in front of both of them, another second some food appeared and the two began to eat.

"You know, I've always enjoyed human food," Angeline said as she daintily cut some rare steak, extra rare, as in, it was still bleeding profusely. "I don't really know why, and it's always driven my parents insane."

"Vampires sustain themselves on nothing but blood right?" asked Harry.

"Yep," Angeline said, right before she took a bite of her food. She chewed a little bit before swallowing. "We can eat human food of course, but it doesn't really do anything for us, because we're already dead and all that. Our bodies just sort of burn up everything we eat, it has something to do with the chemicals inside of our blood. That's why blood is the only source of sustenance that allows us to survive." She took another bite and grinned. "Of course! Blood from something like this steak can keep a vampire from dying as well. We don't need human blood to live."

"But you prefer human blood right?" asked Harry. "Isn't that why vampires usually drink from humans?"

Angeline let out a small giggle. "You obviously watch too many movies," she said lightly, Harry felt a blush spread across his face at being called out on that. It didn't help that he had in fact watched many count Dracula movies with Lisa. "Vampires very rarely drink human blood, only once a week, and even then, only a glass."

Harry stopped eating and looked at her. "Why only a glass?" he felt kind of stupid for asking such a question but Angeline decided to humor him.

"Because more than that and vampires give in to their bloodlust." Angeline leaned back in her seat as she quietly sipped some tea. "A vampire can only drink so much human blood before they give into their own bloodlust and become insane killers who thrive off of feeding on humans, it's ironic really. We need human blood to keep from giving into our bloodlust, but we can only drink so much of it before we go mad."

She smiled as a different thought hit her, "of course! It's different if someone willingly lets us drink from them."

"Why is that?" asked Harry.

"Perhaps I'll tell you another time," she said as she stood up and stretched. "It's getting late so I'm heading to bed."

"Right," Harry stood up and moved over to her.

"I'm not made of glass you know?" Angeline scowled as Harry wrapped and arm around her waist so she could lean on him for support.

"No, but you look it," he quipped.

"Wow, you can be a jerk."

Harry just smiled at the insult, "I'm sure I'll grow on you."

XoX

A loud explosion rocked the small room Harry was using for his alchemy. A scowl came to Harry's face as he looked at his ruined transmutation circle. He just couldn't understand it! He wasn't making any mistakes, despite his perfect memory Harry had double and even triple checked his work just to be sure. There was simply no way he could have made a mistake.

So what was he doing wrong?

"Wow, another failure huh?" Harry scowled as Angeline walked in through the door and looked at the ruined surface. "Man I'm surprised this place is always in such pristine condition considering all of the times you've blown it up."

"Shut up," Harry mumbled as he pulled out his mother's wand, waving it in the air. There was a slight shimmer around the damaged area, cement then began moving back into place and molding with the ground to leave it as a perfect surface again. He sighed, even that little spell was draining after using alchemy.

He really wished Nicholas or at least Perennelle were here so he could ask them what he was doing wrong. But they had both left to 'get there affairs in order before they die' so he was left to his own devices for the next two days or so. A part of Harry was sure they knew he would have problems with this and had left in order to force him to solve this problem on his own.

Behind him, Angeline watched with fascination as Harry repaired the damage he did. It always amazed her to see what wizards could do, vampires themselves could use magic but it was nowhere near as



strong as a wizards. Their bodies were designed for extreme physical feats, not spell casting.

And Harry was exceptionally strong, especially for one so young.

"So, did you need something?" asked Harry as he walked over to her.

Angeline grinned at him. "No, but I do know something you need," she said teasingly.

"Oh?" Harry gave her an amused look, wondering what she could be thinking. "And what's that?" he asked.

"A break."

"What?"

"Yep," she said cheerfully. "I've been watching you work for nearly three days straight, you're going to burn out if you keep going. So what you need is a break."

"Can't," Harry replied. "I need to figure out what I'm doing wrong."

"No," Angeline said slowly, this kids drive was impressive but sometimes he was just too stubborn for his own good. "What you need to do is take a break, it's obvious you're not getting anything finished. Take a small break and then you can get back to it, you need to learn how to take a step back and take a breather. You know, smell the roses and all that."

"I know how to rest," Harry mumbled.

"Yeah, right, and I'm a loyal member of the Vatican," she said sarcastically, grabbing Harry's arm and beginning to pull him out of the room. "Now come on."

XoX

That was how Harry soon found himself walking the streets of Paris, Angeline clinging to his arm. It was a little embarrassing to have someone nearly a head taller than him clinging to his arm, even worse were the developing breasts she was pressing into him. It

was times like things he felt it was a mistake reading all those books on puberty and human reproduction.

In an effort not to think about Angeline and all he had learned on sex from books - as well as how the two subjects were related - Harry decided to focus on their surroundings. He wasn't quite sure where they were, some type of shopping district if all of the clothing and retail stores were anything to go by. However, Angeline seemed to know exactly where they were, and where they were going.

"How is it that you know seem to know where everything is?" asked Harry.

"That's easy," said Angeline as her head turned left and right, she seemed to be looking for something. "I've been to France a lot, in fact, I spend almost as much time in France as I do Italy."

"Really?"

"Yep, after all, France always has the best fashion," she said cheerfully.

"Right," somehow, he felt he should have known that was the reason she knew France so well. What was it with women and fashion? "So what are we doing here?"

"I noticed that aside from the clothes you're wearing now, you have no muggle clothes," Angeline said. "So our first step is to take you shopping for some newer and more fashionable clothes."

"Great," Harry sighed. "You're gonna turn me into a doll."

"I'm glad to see you catch on so quick," she smirked at him.

Harry didn't even bother replying as Angeline dragged him into their first store of the day. What happened next was a blur for Harry as Angeline would drag him into a store, grab several clothes and forced him to try them on. With clothes in hand, Harry was forcefully shoved into one of the changing stalls within the muggle clothing store.

"Hey come on," Angeline called from where she was sitting down. "How long does it take for you to get changed?"

"Don't rush me!" Harry shouted as he tried to get himself dressed, how many damned belts and Velcro's did these pants have?

"There!" he walked out and stood in front of Angeline. "Well?" he asked tartly, an impatient air about him.

"Hmmm..." Angeline looked Harry up and down. "Turn around," she said, sticking her hand in the air and making circular motions with her fingers.

Harry gave an exasperated sigh but did as told, turning around in a circle. Merlin, this was so humiliating.

"No," she said at last, "that outfit looks awful on you." Harry groaned as Angeline grabbed him again and pulled him along with her as she began looking for more clothing for him.

"Let's see," she murmured to herself as she began grabbing several more pairs of pants, shirts and anything else that seemed to catch her attention. After several long minutes – which to Harry felt like hours – she turned around and grinned at him. "Now, try these on," she pushed the clothes into Harry's hands and pushed him back towards the changing rooms.

"Alright, alright, don't get so pushy," he said as he entered the room. He began putting on the new clothing that Angeline had given him, all the while wondering how the hell he had gotten into this position, shopping with a female vampire with a pushy personality. She was worse than Lisa.

He ended up changing into several more sets of clothes, getting a 'no' for each set. It wasn't until he came out wearing a pair of black pants with sharp creases in them, a green shirt that was dark enough it would almost be mistaken for black if not for the light that she seemed to pause in her fashion mania. The shirt was collared and had a V cut that went down to mid chest, with several Velcro's that were strapped around his sleeves. The outfit was finished off with a set of leather boots and a black jacket.

"Well?" asked Harry, feeling impatient at how long this shopping excursion was taking. Normally, he didn't have a problem shopping. Then again, he was normally shopping for others, not himself.

Angeline looked him up and down, made him turn around and tapped her cheeks with a finger. Finally, after several minutes of making Harry completely uncomfortable she smiled. "It's perfect!"

"Huh?" asked Harry, he went to scratch his head in slight confusion before Angeline his hand and began dragging him back towards the clothing section.

"Let's see," she stopped and pushed him back several feet before placing her hands in a square and looking at him through it. "I think we'll need to go three sizes up," she said at last.

"Why would we need clothes three sizes larger?" asked Harry as she set about grabbing the correct size clothing.

"You'll see," she said with a mysterious smile.

They ended up getting the clothes in both his size, and five sizes larger. Once the clothes were bought and paid for Angeline led Harry out of the store and into a small alley way. It was at this time where Harry finally decided he'd had enough and was going to get some answers.

"Ok, look," Harry started as the vampire looked around the alley. "I've gone with what you on this little excursion without complaint so far, now will you tell me what we're doing?"

"In a minute," Angeline replied as she reached into her cleavage, causing Harry to blush beet red.

"W-what are you doing?" he stuttered, his eyes widening to dinner plate proportions.

Angeline rolled her eyes as she pulled out two small vials of a slightly green tinted liquid, she held one out to Harry. "Here, drink this," she said.

Harry took the vial and studied it. "Aging potion," he said, looking back up at her.

"Wow, got that from just the color did you?" she teased.

"When did you have time to make this?" he asked, ignoring her remark. A small, knowing smile appeared on her face and he put the pieces together. "You didn't," he concluded, deadpanning, "you took it from my stock, didn't you?"

"Maybe," she said, her smile still in place. "Now, strip down so your clothes don't get ripped when you take the potion, then get changed."

"Here!" asked Harry, his eyes bulging. At her nod and grin he said, "Can you at least turn around or something?"

"What? Why would I do that? I was hoping for a show," Angeline pouted.

Harry blushed, before shaking his head and growling at the girl, he pulled out his mother's wand and looked around for a moment. No one besides them was there. He waved his wand and conjured a wall that surrounded him, were it not for the wall he would have seen his companions pout get bigger.

He stared at the aging potion in his hands before sighing. "In for a penny, in for a pound," he muttered before stripping off his clothing, popping the cap of the vial and downing the liquid inside. He had already gone along with Angeline this far, might as well go all the way.

For a second nothing happened, then, a moment later he felt the potion kick in. It felt like he was being stretched, his bones were elongating, making him taller, his skin was stretching and growing to accommodate, and his body and face were leaning out as the potion did it's work. Harry decided that the entire thing felt uncomfortable and he would only use an aging potion if he for some reason absolutely needed to be older.

When he stopped growing the aged raven haired boy put on the clothing Angeline had made him buy. He had to admit, she had a pretty good eye, the clothes fit him near perfectly.

A swish of his wand and he conjured a full body mirror so that he could look at himself. Harry found himself staring at a young man of about seventeen or eighteen years old; his face was much leaner, all of the baby fat that had been on it was gone and yet he still

maintained a slightly boyish look. There were strains in the clothes along the biceps, shoulder, chest and thighs where his muscle had increased as well. Now Harry was by no means vain, and had never really considered himself handsome or even really thought about how physically attractive he might be, but he had to admit. He looked good.

The mirror and walls dissolved as Harry dispelled the magic he had used to make them. "So what do you...you...you..." Harry started to say, only to trail off as he saw Angeline standing there.

A much older, much hotter Angeline with a very seductive smile.

Judging by her face, Harry would guess she was around his age, seventeen or eighteen. Her cheekbones were higher than they had been, giving her an aristocratic look that still remained soft and complimented her small pert nose and full, ruby red lips very well. Her blue eyes and skin both seemed to have an unearthly glow to them, even more so than she had before.

Her outfit, was a long full body, black dress that clung to her like a second skin, revealing a figure that should not belong on any mortal. There were no sleeves, allowing her bare shoulders to show, the paleness of her skin contrasting enticingly with the black of her dress. A low V cut showed off a very firm set of large breasts, while the tightness allowed Harry to see very curve of her lithe waist and toned stomach, before moving along to a well-defined set of hips. A slit ran down the left side of her dress, stopping just above the middle of her thigh and showing off long, toned and pale legs that seemed to go on for miles before ending in a pair of blood red heels. The entire outfit looked like the stereotypical Vampire outfit he had seen in Halloween stores before, but on Angeline the whole thing screamed sexy and dangerous.

Against his will Harry felt his body start to respond, and if Angelines increasing smile were anything to go by, she noticed as well. "It's nice to see a man who can stand at attention," she commented lightly, her voice was a lot more seductive than before, with low overtones and a slight purr to it.

"W-What?" Harry asked, his voice containing a slight waver, his face burning as he tried desperately not to think about how stunning the vision of beauty was in front of him. He looked at her for several long

seconds, his mind processing her words, before looking at himself, wondering what she meant. His eyes widened when he looked down and saw the large pitch tent on his pants. He felt his face burning and it took a supreme amount of will and effort to bring both his blush and his growing erection under control.

Angeline smiled as she watched him. It was very impressive to see how he was dealing with his new age, despite having not actually gone through the process of puberty. He was a very strong willed boy.

"Now that we're dressed, we're ready," Angeline said, taking his arm and placing it in between her breasts. With his arm mashed between the two large, firm globes that the beautiful vampire possessed, Harry felt himself stiffen even more as his body began going into overdrive.

"R-ready for what?" asked Harry, doing everything humanly possible to keep his attention away from where his arm was. What was going on?

Angeline smiled a knowing smile. "Why, we're going to a party of course."

XoX

"You put something in that potion didn't you?" asked Harry as they stood in line to some kind of party. They were in a less pleasant part of Paris, it looked like a series of old warehouses. There was loud music coming from the one in front of him. Harry thought it sounded like a mix of disco and electronica.

"What do you mean?" asked Angeline, not looking at him.

"Don't play with me," Harry said, a light growl in his voice. Angeline's shiver went unnoticed as he glared at her. "An aging potion does nothing more than change the physical body to an older age, it doesn't affect a person's biology."

He had been trying to figure out what was wrong with him on the taxi ride to this place. It had been very difficult with the way the vampire had molded her body against his, especially when her hands had been idly running through his hair. His body was reacting to

Angeline as if he were actually eighteen years old, something that shouldn't happen with a simple aging potion.

"What did you put in the potion?" he asked, a slight snarl in his voice.

"Hmmm," Angeline hummed a bit as she smiled. "I may have added a little potion to help increase your testosterone levels."

Harry scowled. "So essentially you added something like muggle Viagra?" he asked.

"Something like that," she admitted, not at all caring that he was angry.

"Why?"

"Well, if you're going to be eighteen years old, then you should be able to enjoy all that comes with that age," she replied with small smirk.

"What?" asked Harry, confused, only to be ignored as they stepped to the front of the line.

"Name?" asked the large bouncer who stood at the entrance wearing a black tuxedo, sunglasses (Despite it starting to get dark) and holding a clipboard in his hand.

"Do we really need a name to get in?" asked Angeline, leaning over slightly so the bouncer could see a decent amount of cleavage. She gave the man a seductive smile that had him all but eating out of the palm of her hand. "Couldn't you just let us in on a favor?"

The man stared down her shirt and Harry felt his body once again respond against his will, a strong desire to beat the crap out of the man who was looking at his date came over him. He wanted nothing more then to pound the mans face in for gawking at his woman!

Harry, paused, startled. Shaking his head as a frown came to his face.

Where did that thought come from?



"Yeah, sure, you can go in," the man said after a while. He held open the door and Angeline smiled as she walked in. Harry made to follow but the man moved in front of him, blocking him from entering. "Only she can go in," he said.

Harry grit his teeth, how dare this fool stop him from entering! This guy needed to be taught a lesson. He punched the man right in the chest, and added a banishing spell the moment his fist made contact.

The end result.

The bouncer was sent flying back, crashing into and then straight through the door, shattering it and skidding to a stop ten feet away.

Harry walked in and stepped on the man, eliciting a pained groan due to just where he had stepped. He stopped in front of Angeline who was looking at him with an admiring gaze.

Maybe it was being pumped full of testosterone, maybe it was his body catching up to his mind, or maybe it was the adrenaline he could feel pumping through him from downing the bouncer with a single (Magical) punch. But Harry was starting to feel a lot bolder.

If he was going to have to suffer through being in an eighteen year old body full of testosterone, then he should at least be able to enjoy it, were his thoughts.

"Shall we?" he asked Angeline with a disarming smile as he held out his arm. The ends of Angeline's lips curved into a smile as she took his arm and led him onto the dance floor.

The security who had been moving towards them seemed to back off as they walked further in. Of course, it could have been the glare Angeline sent them, backed up by a mild amount of killing intent (a vampire ability). Not that Harry noticed as they made their way to the center of the dance floor.

"I hope you know how to dance!" she said with a grin, yelling over the music to make herself heard.

"I've never danced before in my life!" Harry admitted, yelling back. "Not like this anyway! But I've seen enough movies and dancing isn't much different from combat, all it takes is finding the rhythm!"

Angeline smirked, "I hope you can back up those words." Harry had no time to make any kind of snappy come-back as Angeline began to dance, dance being a relative word.

Harry watched as his companions hips began to move and shake seductively, her hands were raised above her head, then brought down where they traveled along the curve of her body, running down her neck, over breasts and along her stomach. Throughout it all her eyes remained firmly on him, her seductive smile set in place.

Her hips swayed and moved to the music, reminding Harry of belly dancers in ancient Egypt that had been tasked to entertain the Pharaoh. It was easily the most seductive and sensual thing Harry had ever seen, minus a few movies he had seen when Lisa had looked through some of the movies her parents had forbade her from watching.

His body began to respond again and Harry quickly turned on his occlumency shields, slamming them down tighter than his Gringotts Vault. Despite this, it did almost nothing. With his hormones in control, for the most part, he moved behind her and began to dance himself.

It took a while, finding the rhythm amongst this kind of chaotic movement was more difficult than when he was in combat. He chalked it up to being something different then what he was used to.

When his body began to move in sync with Angeline's, the beautiful and seductive vampire grinned and move closer to him. So close that Harry felt her firm, round bum pressing against him and begin grinding into his crotch. A shiver ran through him and he was no longer sure whether he should curse Angeline, or thank her for the arousal he was now feeling.

He knew that he was out of his league in this situation. Harry had long since been considered older than his years would indicate. That was the only reason Mr. and Mrs. Crawft allowed him to take their daughter to downtown London without them. But even though he knew about puberty and sex and had read about everything involved, he had never been, or even thought about the situation he was now in. And he wasn't exactly sure how to react. He felt like a kid playing at being an adult.

However, thanks to the potion Angeline had given him, he was feeling a lot more, aggressive, he felt was the right word. It wasn't enough to level the playing field in whatever game she was playing with him, but it at least helped him keep some modicum of composure while she played her game.

His hands moved and settled themselves on Angeline's hips as he pulled her even closer, their bodies melding together. In retaliation Angeline leaned against him even more, her arms came up and encircled his neck as her head rested against his.

"Finally enjoying yourself, are we?" she asked, her voice was a light pant and Harry shivered as her warm breath hit his neck.

"Might as well," Harry shot back., trying and failing to keep the blush off his face. He wondered if he would ever be able to look at his female friends the same way after this. Still, he did his best not to let his slight inner turmoil become known to his companion. "It would really suck if I didn't get anything out of this."

"Now don't be like that," Harry could almost hear the pout in her voice. "I just wanted you to loosen up is all."

"Just dance," Harry grumbled, defeated.

Angeline grinned as she brought her face even closer and licked some of the sweat off his jaw line, eliciting a shiver from him. "Your taste is so intoxicating," she said, her voice was a whisper but Harry heard it all the same and despite his best efforts felt a blush on his face.

"What did I say about dancing?" he questioned.

Angeline smiled at him. "Very well." The rest of the night was spent with the two of them dancing, grinding there, by now, sweat covered bodies against each other.

XoX

The next morning Harry woke up in his bed. Sitting up he looked around and frowned, he didn't remember ever entering his room. So how had he gotten there?

Sighing he stood up and walked into the bathroom, he turned the water to the shower head on and stripped off his boxers, which were the only things he had on. He didn't remember getting out of his clothing either.

When the water warmed up Harry stepped into the shower and stood there, letting the grime he felt from last night wash away. As he stood there his mind couldn't help but replay the night he had with Angeline. Last night had been, odd, to him at least. He knew it was wrong for someone of his age to have enjoyed his time there, aging potion or no. And yet, he had actually enjoyed his time at the dance club. It had felt like his body had finally caught up to his mind, at least in some ways.

Harry had never really thought about girls in any romantic sense, he could honestly say when he thought a member of the opposite sex was pretty, which was more than most boys his age could, but it had never gone beyond that.

Last night had been different. With the potion Angeline had mixed into his aging potion his body had responded in a way any eighteen year old's body would to an attractive female coming onto him. Harry also couldn't help but wonder if his mind had fully matured with it, or if it had always been like that and his biological responses had simply pushed it along. The whole thing was confusing.

A scowl marred his face and he shook his head, causing water to fly around and hit the walls of the shower. A part of him wished he could forget about the whole incident, more mature than his age or not, this wasn't the type of thing he wanted to be thinking about right now. It was just another part of being cursed with eidetic memory. He would never forget last night no matter how hard he tried.

With a sigh Harry did his best to put last night out of his mind and finished cleaning himself off. He stepped out of the shower and grabbed a towel hanging on the rack to his left, drying himself off. He walked back into his bedroom and changed into the clothes on his bed and then made his way to get some breakfast.

"Good morning!" Angeline chirped as Harry stepped out onto the Veranda.

Harry groaned, he really didn't want to see her right now. "Morning," he mumbled as he sat down and began to eat the food that appeared, doing his best to ignore the presence of the vampire girl next to him.

"You're not ignoring me are you?" she asked, an infernal smirk plastered on her face. She poked him in the cheek as he tried to eat. "Come on, didn't you have fun with me last night?"

Harry growled as he tried to hold in his blush, his body may not be reacting like it had last night but he could still remember its reaction as clear as day. "Could you just leave me alone," he snapped and went back to his eating.

Angeline giggled at him. "Aw, you're not embarrassed are you, Harry? After last night you have no reason to be," she said, giggling even more as she got another glare.

She leaned in as Harry closed his eyes in an effort to pretend she wasn't there and whispered seductively in his ear, "didn't you enjoy feeling my body against yours?" she watched as his face took on a shade that would have put a Weasley to shame and grinned. Just a little bit further. "I know you loved how our hot, sweaty bodies melded when we danced. I could feel your reaction."

Harry grit his teeth and even through his blush sent her a glare. "I should have never gone along with you," he hissed out.

"You're just upset because you enjoyed it so much," she said lightly.

"That's not the point," Harry said, "Because of you I –" he stopped as what she said when trying to rile him up penetrated his brain. There was something about what she said that had gotten him thinking.

"Harry?" she asked, confused at his sudden shift in emotions.

"That's it!" Harry shouted as he stood up, startling Angeline, who jumped out of her seat as well.

"What's it?" she asked as Harry ignored her and ran into the mansion. "Hey! Harry! Where are you going!"

Harry paid no attention to her as he ran through the hall, down the stairs and entered the laboratory. He held out his hand and summoned some chalk before he knelt down and began drawing a transmutation circle. He now knew what he had done wrong.

It was just finished when Angeline walked in, closing the door behind her as she watched Harry work. She would have said something, but even she knew better than to say anything once Harry got like this.

Harry pulled out and quickly conjured a cloth that he wrapped around his head as soon as it was formed. Despite all his practice Harry still could not conjure with nothing more than a hand wave, but promised himself he would get it soon with more practice.

With that done he wiped his hands and then placed them in front of the circle, then he channeled his magic. The metal he had placed in the center began to spark as energy ran through it, and Harry watched on baited breath as it suddenly began to morph, looking like a liquid as it changed shape. The metal turned a copper color and the blob it had become shifted, growing before several segments split. Two formed a pair of legs and another formed a set of arms and the last split on top formed a head. What now stood in place was a perfect replica Angeline in her eighteen year old form.

"Yes!" Harry cheered, losing all semblance of maturity as he basked in his accomplishment. "I did it! I did it!"

Before Angeline had a chance to open her mouth Harry whirled on her, laughing as he scooped her up into a hug and twirled her around.

"Hey! W-what are you doing? Put me down!" Angeline shouted, a blush spreading across her face and a odd flutter in her stomach.

Harry grinned as he set her down. "Thank you," he said earnestly. Angeline looked away for a moment and blushed at his heartfelt thanks, a part of her wondered what the hell had gotten into her. Hadn't she just been teasing him a few minutes ago?

"You're welcome," she said softly. Then turned a confused look on him, "What exactly are you thanking me for though?"

"Do you remember what you said when during breakfast?"

"You mean about how hot our dance was last night?" she questioned with a grin.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Sort of," he said. "But I was talking more about how you mentioned sweat." Angeline blinked at him in confusion and he elaborated, "when I was drawing my circle there were no mistakes in it, so I couldn't figure out what I was doing wrong."

"And how does me mentioning sweat help you with your problem?"

"Because I was getting sweat in my circle," he said, smiling brightly. "I remember every time I tried to transmute I would start to sweat due to the effort and sheer amount of magic it took, my sweat ended up getting on the circle and messing with my transmutation. Everything within a transmutation circle affects the transmutation. My sweat wasn't accounted for during the process and so it kept messing up my work."

"I see," Angeline said. She really didn't see but it seemed like a good thing to say. "You know what this means don't you?"

"That I'm done with my training?" he asked.

"No," she smiled, "it means we need to go out and celebrate."

Harry eyed her warily, something she noticed and rolled her eyes. "Oh, fine, we won't go to any parties like last night," she said.

"We won't go to any parties period," Harry corrected. "If we're going to celebrate than we'll be doing something I want to do."

"Fine," Angeline sighed, "so long as we do something, I guess I can't complain."

"Good, then meet me near the front door in half an hour," he told her before heading towards the door. He was just about to walk out when Angeline's voice stopped him.

"Oh, before I forget, do you think I could use Hedwig to send someone a letter?" Harry turned back to her and adopted a thinking pose.

"Sure," he said after a moment, "she's probably getting bored just flying around here anyways." The Flamel's weren't letting him send any messages into England for fear someone would backtrack her to them.

XoX

Angeline decided to take a quick shower before writing her note. As she got out and dried herself off her eyes found herself staring at her reflection in the mirror, more specifically the cross shaped scar that was on her left breast.

She felt a chill run through her as she thought about what would have happened had Harry not been in the area and found her. Had he not been there, she knew that she would not have lived to see another day.

Shaking the thoughts off she decided to get dressed, ignoring the clothes that the house elves put on her bed Angeline walked into the closet. She took off a dress of similar make to the one she had worn last night, placing it against her she quickly decided not to wear it. She had her fun with Harry already, it wouldn't do to push him away by being too forward. Finding people who didn't care about her being a vampire was hard enough as it was, and she didn't want to lose a friend because she was too forward in her advances.

After several minutes she decided on a pair of jeans that hung low on her hips, a black leather belt, red sleeveless shirt and a black dragon hide jacket she had convinced Harry to get her two days ago. She walked out and moved over to a full body mirror, spinning around as she looked at herself before deciding she was perfect.

She walked over to the desk and grabbed a sheet of paper, some ink, a quill and began writing. When she finished the letter she grabbed an envelope and placed it inside before sealing it with wax, then took her ring and pressed it against the slowly cooling wax, leaving an indent. Now all she needed to do was get Harry's owl to deliver the letter.



It wasn't that hard to find Hedwig, if she wasn't outside flying then she was sitting on her perch in Harry's room.

"Do you think you can deliver this to Count Pallidus?" she asked the snowy white owl, holding out the letter. She felt kind of stupid asking an owl to do something as if it could understand her, but Hedwig just looked from the letter to her, back to the letter and then to her before nodding and sticking out its leg.

"Uh, thanks," Angeline hid her shock as she tied the letter to Hedwig's leg and it gave her a hoot before taking off.

A few seconds later the door to the shower opened and Harry walked out, a towel around his waist and his hair still wet. He stopped mid-stride as he looked at Angeline and blinked a few times before turning red.

"Damn it! What are you doing in here!" asked Harry as he ran into the closet.

Angeline thought about telling him she was just getting Hedwig to deliver her letter, but the more she thought about it the more she wanted to tease him some more. "Well, I was hoping since you didn't give me a show when I gave you that potion, you'd be willing to give me one now."

A growl emanated from the closet and Angeline grinned. A few minutes later Harry came out wearing a pair of black jeans that were slightly faded along the knees and a green shirt with a leather jacket over it.

"Wow, you look nice," she said, smiling at him.

Harry sighed, "let's just go before I change my mind."

Angeline giggled a little as she took one of Harry's arms into both of hers, the response was nowhere near as pronounced when he had been on the potion that essentially simulated puberty, but the blush on his face indicated he still remembered last very well.

"So where are we going?" she asked as they moved to the front of the house, the only place in the whole house that had an apparition point.

"You'll see," Harry replied with a smile, glad to finally be able to use the words she had used against him previously. She pouted and tried to pry the information from him but nothing worked and she eventually gave up. The moment they reached the front of the house they stopped and Harry looked at her, "you ready?"

He didn't give her a chance to respond as he pulled her closer and the two of them disappeared with a soft pop.

After a small series of apparitions, in which Harry used alleys that he knew would not have people in or near them, they appeared behind the Notre-Dame. Angeline watched as her friend took out his mother's wand and opened the portal to Ruelle de magie, stowed the wand away and then grabbed her hand and began pulling her along.

Harry navigated his way through the streets until he found the restaurant he had first eaten at, made his way inside and sat down at one of the booths. Angeline slid into a seat next to him and smiled. "Whats this Harry, taking me out on a date?" she asked, batting her eyelashes at him. "My how forward."

"Call it what you want," Harry said, a long suffering sigh escaping his lips. "However, I'm far too young to be dating, I think, and your older than me."

"Only by two years," Angeline said with a pout. "And I don't see why you would think that, we had a fun time last night, didn't we?"

"First off," Harry started, trying to keep the blush on his face from spreading. "We used an aging potion and you gave me A dulous potion to go with it, so technically, I was eighteen when we went on our 'date'."

"So you do consider that a date!" Angeline clapped her hands together and put a smile on her face.

Harry rolled his eyes, "Yes, sure, I consider it a date. Happy?"

"Of course."

A few minutes into their conversation the same girl who had first served Harry walked up to them and seemed to recognized him from the other day. "Hello again, I didn't know if I would see you again," she said to him.

"Hello," Harry smiled.

"And you brought a date with you," the girl gushed, causing him to both frown and blush, while Angeline gave him a victorious smirk. "Oh that's so cute! Now, what can I get you two?"

Doing his best to ignore Angeline's grin, he gave his order, "I would like your Bouillabaisse."

"And I would like your Fondue Bourguignone - Salade Verte," Angeline said. "And get us a glass of your finest wine."

The girl looked between the two at that but shrugged and told them their order would be right up. Dinner was a slight affair, between eating and light conversation, which centered around Angeline teasing Harry a bit, and Harry trying to change the subject to content that didn't involve his friend talking about something embarrassing. Needless to say it didn't work. They only stayed a little while after dinner as Angeline told Harry the proper way to sip wine.

"Tasting wine is an art, or so my father says" Angeline told him with a playful role of her eyes. "But it is not just about the taste; it is about the color and the aroma as well. First, we look at the wine itself. The color of wine can vary tremendously; white wines can range from green to yellow to brown. As a general rule, the more color you can see, the older the wine is; although, brown may indicate that the wine is not fit for dogs. Time can dramatically improve a good red wine, but it ruins most whites. Red wines can range in color from a pale red to a rich burgundy, and usually become lighter as they age.

"Now, tilt your glass slightly and look at the edge. What color do you see?"

"It seems to be a kind of brown orange," Harry replied.

"Good," Angeline gave an approving nod. "That is a sign of a mature wine. If it had a purple tint, it would be a very young wine. Now we swirl the wine." Here, Angeline moved over to him, grasping the

hand he had holding the cup in hers – much to his embarrassment – and swirling the wine around. She leaned in close, and he shivered as her warm breath hit his ear. "This has several purposes – it releases the molecules, allowing us to smell the bouquet of the wine, and it allows us to visually inspect the body of the wine; to see how it reacts. This wine," she said, smiling as she noticed he was trying his hardest to pay attention to her words, and failing slightly. "Has, as you English would put it, good legs, which means that it has a thicker body and a slightly higher alcohol content. Now, take a quick sniff of the wine, make an initial impression, and then take a deeper sniff."

She let go of his hand and leaned back, making Harry sigh in relief as his shoulders slumped ever so slightly. He sent her a mild glare, which was returned with a smirk. Realizing that he wasn't going to win in this, he sighed, before doing as told.

"It smells slightly spicy," he said.

Angeline gave a nod. "Now take a sip."

Harry raised the glass to his mouth and let the wine wash over his taste buds, before he swallowed. "Hmm... it's not bad. It has a very pleasant after taste..." It was good he had to admit, though Harry did not think he would be drinking wine very often.

"It's alright," Angeline commented as she drank her own. "My father owns his own vineyards, says wine is the next best thing to blood." She shook her head, "I swear, I could never really understand his obsession with it."

"You seem to like it well enough," Harry commented.

Angeline just shrugged, "I never said I didn't, I just don't understand my father's obsession with it."

XoX

After dinner the pair found themselves standing in front of a muggle movie theater, Harry cast a discreet confundus charm on the booth operator and bought a pair of tickets for Bram Stoker's Dracula on Angeline's suggestion.

"It will be interesting to see how muggles view vampire's," she admitted as they bought a large popcorn and two drinks.

They found a pair of seats in the middle of the theater. As the movie began to play Angeline began to poke fun at the movie, pointing out all of the mistakes muggles had made when depicting vampires.

"They are correct in that some vampires can change forms, and some even have a bat form," she said as they watched Dracula transform. "However, very few ever reach that level of power. Only a vampire whose been around for maybe four hundred years or so will ever gain that ability."

As the movie wore on the two of them stopped talking, Angeline glanced over at Harry who was slowly munching popcorn with his eyes focused on the screen. She looked back at the movie, then to Harry. Thankful that it was so dark so no one could see the slight red tinge to her cheeks she leaned over and placed her head on his shoulder.

Startled, Harry stopped eating and looked down at her, trying to ignore the way his face began to heat up. Through the dim lighting of the movie, Harry's enhanced vision could pick up the small smile on the beautiful girls face.

"You ok?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Of course, why wouldn't I be?" she asked with as much nonchalance as she could muster, bringing a hand up and grabbing some popcorn to munch on.

"Your face is red," Harry commented as he turned to look back up at the screen, thereby missing Angeline's face going slightly redder.

"Just feeling a little cold," she lied.

Harry frowned, he still hadn't read up on vampire's and only knew what she had told him, still, he didn't think vampires got cold. He guessed it didn't really matter, and figured she was just embarrassed about something. Though what was anyone's guess as far as he was concerned.

"I could give you my jacket," he offered.

"No, this is fine," she said, trying to play it off.

Harry looked at her for a moment and shrugged his unused shoulder before going back to watching the movie. Despite all his intelligence Harry knew he would never understand girls.

XoX

"Morning Harry."

Harry looked up from his notes and meal towards the door to see Angeline standing there, still in her Pajama bottoms, rubbing sleep from her eyes. "Morning," he said, grinning a tad as he saw how tired she looked, "tired?"

"Shut up," she mumbled as she sat down heavily in her seat, she looked like the walking dead.

"You know, I don't think I've ever seen you look like this," Harry commented as he went back to his notes. "What's up?"

She sighed, "I was hoping to get a reply from that letter I sent," she told him with a yawn.

"So you stayed up all night?"

"Father is normally very quick to respond to his families letters," she said with a frown, "and I'm his youngest daughter. He's always been a little, over protective of me when it came to being on my own. And this is the first time I've been anywhere without my vassals."

"Huh, interesting," Harry murmured. "Your house was attacked though right? He could have been injured and isn't able to respond as fast." He could have also been dead, but Harry didn't want to give her that kind of thought. "Plus, you only gave Hedwig his name, right? Even for her, it will take a while to find him."

"Yeah I guess," she mumbled as she stared at the rising sun. "But I need to get back soon."

"Why?"

"I'm a vampire," she said, "remember what I told you? Vampires need human blood otherwise they give into their bloodlust."

"Yes, I remember you saying that," Harry said, pausing for a moment. "So you need glass of human blood once a week?"

"Yes, and its almost been a week since I've gone without," she said.

"You do realize there is an easy way to solve this problem, right?" he said.

Angeline turned to look at him dumbly, "huh?"

Rolling his eyes Harry pulled out his mother's wand and conjured a small dagger and a wine glass. He was just about to cut a slit in his wrist when Angeline startled voice said, "you're going to let me drink your blood?" causing him to turn and look at her.

Harry found the incredulous and shocked look on her face extremely amusing. "You're my friend, and you need human blood, right? Of course I would give you some."

Angeline blinked several times as Harry slit his wrist – his face not even registering the pain, much to Angeline's surprise – and allowed his blood to pour into the glass, handing it to her when it was full, then healing the cut with his mother's wand.

"Thank you," she murmured with a blush, taking the glass in her hand and sipping from it.

Almost as soon as she did her taste buds went into over drive as Harry's highly magical blood intoxicated her tongue.

"Merlin!" she gasped before taking another sip, "you have some of the most intoxicating blood I've ever drank!"

"Uh... thanks?" asked Harry, unsure as to whether she was giving him a compliment or not. Perhaps giving her his blood wasn't such a good idea.

When the glass was drained Angeline licked her lips, "wow, your blood is so much better than the transfusion packs my family gets

from the hospital we own. You know, I'm tempted to keep you with me just for your blood."

"Well, thanks," Harry replied sarcastically. "It makes me feel so warm and fuzzy inside, knowing you want to use me as a blood bank."

"Aw don't be like that," Angeline said, grinning as she found herself back in her usual character. "That was a compliment, besides," her voice took on a little more of a seductive purr. "There are other things I would like to use you for."

By now Harry had gotten used to the girls constant seductress act and it no longer really bothered him. "You do know I'm only eleven right?"

"But you won't be forever," she said. "It would be better for me to just keep you with me so that no one else has a chance to sink their claws into you."

For some reason, that comment reminded Harry of Blaise's sister. He opened his mouth to respond with a witty comeback – he hoped – but Hedwig chose that moment to come back, swooping down on the table and dropping a letter in front of Angeline.

"It's from daddy!" she said, ripping the letter open and reading it. She stood up and pushed her chair away, "Harry, I'm gonna need you to take me to Ruelle De Magique at noon. In the meantime, I'm going to get packed."

"Uh, ok," Harry said unsurely. He looked down and saw that she had left the note on the table, picking it up he skimmed over and sighed. He stood up and decided to put on some good clothes, it wouldn't make a good first impression if he met a vampire wearing muggle clothes.

XoX

So who exactly are we looking for?" asked Harry as he and Angeline wove their way through the crowded streets of Ruelle De Magique.

"My body guards," she said. "The letter said they'd meet us at La Servuese."



"I know where we're going," Harry scowled at her back. "I was asking who we were meeting, and what they look like."

"Oh, well, they look like – ah! There they are!" Angeline shouted and waved over near an older renaissance style bar. "Ilene! Katreena!"

Two women turned in her direction, both looked to be in their mid to late twenties, with long black hair, pale skin and a body similar to Angeline when she took the aging potion. They were both wearing dark colored dresses that looked similar but different from a wizards cloak, mainly in that it did not cover their forms. Harry wondered if it was common garb for a vampire. For some reason, he assumed all vampires – at least the females – enjoyed looking as sexy as possible.

He immediately cursed himself for even thinking that thought.

"Angeline!" one of the women, one with blue eyes very similar to Angeline's ran up and gave the younger girl a hug. "We were so worried about you, when we couldn't find a trace of you near your hideout –"

"Sorry," Angeline interrupted her, backing away. "I didn't mean to worry you or anyone else. I ran into some trouble and couldn't get a message out."

"They followed you?" asked the other woman, she had green eyes and her expression was a little cold. "We saw the news about the two soldiers being caught in the Louvre, the meusiem is actually pressing charges on vandalism against the Vatican. But there was no mention of you."

"I was caught, but Harry rescued me."

The two vampires looked at each other, then turned back to Angeline. "Harry?" they both asked.

"Yes," Angeline grabbed Harry who had just caught up to her. "This is Harry! He's the one who's been taking care of me."

"Nice to meet you two," Harry said, nodding his head to the two in turn.

Green eyes narrowed her eyes as she looked at his forehead, "are you –"

"I don't think we want to start a riot here," Harry interrupted politely, if a little curtly. "I'm not exactly supposed to be in France."

"It seems my little sister gets to have all the fun," the one with blue eyes pouted. "Getting rescued by a celebrity and having him nurse her back to health."

"Why isn't father here?" asked Angeline, trying to turn her sisters attention away from her tirade. It was only temporary, she knew, the minute they left she was going to get teased mercilessly.

"Injured," green eyes said, "he stayed behind to give the rest of the family time to run and was injured in the process."

"Is he alright?" asked Angeline, the tone of her voice expressing her concern.

"He's fine," blue eyes assured the younger girl. "But he's too weak to be walking around, even sunlight might injure him in his state." It was something of a joke, albeit not in good taste. Harry had learned quite a bit about vampires from Angeline and knew sunlight didn't hurt pureblood vampires like Angeline and her father.

"But he's alright, right?" asked Angeline, wanting to be sure.

"Yes, yes, he's alright," blue eyes grinned. "You don't think a bunch of foolish mortals could truly kill our king did you?"

"King!" Harry asked, startled enough to blurt his thoughts out loud. "You mean to tell me you're a princess!"

"Did I forget to mention that?" asked Angeline with a grin.

"Why didn't you say something?"

"Would it have changed anything?"

"Well, probably not," Harry admitted, "still, it would have been nice to know something like that."

"You know now, I don't see what the problem is."

Harry growled, "the problem is –"

"If you two are done having your little lovers spat," green eyes said. "We need to leave, princess. Your father is waiting."

"Fine," Angeline sighed, turning around fully to face Harry. She looked at him and opened her mouth before frowning, she closed it and opened it again only to find she didn't know what to say.

"Um..."

"I'll be sure to keep in touch," Harry said, holding out his hand to her.

She ignored the hand and grabbed him by the shoulder, pulling him into a tight hug. Harry blushed a bit, but thankfully his body gave no more of a response than that. After a moment or two, he returned the hug, both enjoying the feel of her body as it pressed against his, as well as cursing the fact that he was enjoying it.

"This sucks," Angeline mumbled.

Harry frowned. "What does?"

"I'm not going to see you again."

"What are you talking about?" said Harry, prying her arms off him and looking at her curiously. "We'll see each other sometime."

"How do you know that?" she asked.

"Because you're my friend," he shrugged, as if that answered everything. At her look he elaborated by saying, "I know your name, and Hedwig shouldn't have trouble finding you. I'll send you letters and if your father allows it, I'm sure we'll be able to see each other again."

Angeline looked down, seemingly finding something interesting on the floor. She looked back up and bit her lip for a moment before reaching into her shirt and pulling out a necklace with a blood red

crystal on it. The two vampires behind her gasped as she placed it around a confused Harry's neck.

"You know I'm not really much for jewelry," he said with a wry look.

"You already have two, one more won't hurt," Angeline shot back.

"Yes, but those are manly necklaces," Harry returned, pulling his yin-yang and shark tooth necklaces out. "These are not girly in any way, shape or form." He then grabbed the red jeweled necklace, "this looks like it belongs on a... well, on a princess."

"That's not just any necklace," Angeline told him, rolling her eyes a bit. It seemed that despite Harry's maturity he was still just a typical boy in some aspects. "That stone is called a bloodstone, it's very rare and is often only worn by vampire royalty."

"Lady Angeline, why are you giving that to him?" green eyes asked harshly. "You know that your father –"

"Will mind his own damn business if he knows what's good for him!" Angeline shot back with fierce glare. "I can give this to whomever I want, and no one, not you, nor my father can tell me who I can give this too!"

Harry watched as Angeline the green eyed woman glared at each other, feeling distinctly uncomfortable. He didn't know what was going on, but her giving him this necklace was clearly very important, thought why that would be he couldn't for the life of him fathom.

Surprisingly enough, it was the woman with the cold demeanor who lost the glaring contest, turning her eyes away from Angeline with a huff. With a triumphant smirk on her face, Angeline turned back to Harry. "I want you to hold onto that for me, that way, we're bound to meet again."

"I don't really think you need to do something like this," Harry commented, his hand going to the necklace. He saw the frown on her face and quickly continued, saying, "but if it makes you feel better than I'll hold onto it and return it to you the next time we meet."

"Good," Angline grabbed his head with both of her hands and smashed her lips against his, causing Harry to freeze in place. The kiss was so completely unexpected that the raven haired boy was unable to do anything more than stiffen, not that he would have really known what to do had he not been so surprised anyways.

"W-what the hell was that for!" asked Harry when Angeline broke away from him. He went up to wipe his mouth but the girl who had just stolen his first kiss grabbed his hand and grinned at him.

"Now don't do that," she chided, pouting at him in a way that would have likely brought any hormone raging teenager to a state of delirium. "It would hurt my feelings." Harry scowled a little but it was ineffective thanks to his blush. "And think of that as...incentive, something to look forward to the next time we meet." She grinned at him, "who knows, by then you may be old enough that we can do even more... adult activities."

Harry looked away from her, making the vampire princess laugh before she and her two guards, one who was amused and the other grinding her teeth in aggravation walked away. When they were gone Harry grumbled, wiped his mouth, and went on his way back to the Flamel estate.

He would never, ever, understand girls.

XoX

A number of people didn't like the language thing. I fixed it up a bit in the last chapter by adding English in parenthesis within the sentence, that way you don't have to look at the bottom of the page. I will also be going back and fixing the translations as Sophywald was kind enough to send me the corrections.

No big speech for you guys today.

Pokemaster12, signing off.  
Review this Chapter

## Chapter 4: Dobby the House Elf

XoX

Albus Dumbledore sighed as he rested his elbows on the desk, his fingers interlaced together as he leaned his head on his hands. "I think I may have made a mistake Fawkes," the Headmaster admitted, catching the attention of his phoenix familiar. "The Harry Potter who came to Hogwarts is a lot different then the one I had planned for."

It had always been one of the few flaws he could see in his plans. He had always worried about the kind of person that Harry would be when he came to Hogwarts. Would he be a kind and caring person like his mom? Mischievous and slightly arrogant like his dad? Or would be evil incarnate, much like Voldemort had been so many years ago when Dumbledore had first met him as a child? Despite his insistence in leaving young Harry on the doorstep of the Dursley's, he had never stopped worrying about the kind of person the young wizard would be when he came to Hogwarts.

He had his hopes and estimations of course. When Harry Potter reentered the Wizarding World, Albus Dumbledore had been expecting a young child who was shy, slightly nervous and unsure of himself. A boy who knew nothing of magic and all the great possibilities it had to offer. When he had placed Harry on the Dursley's doorstep it had been his hope that they would be able to ground the boy in the basic principles and life lessons that he would need to learn before learning of magic. They would show him that magic was not the only way of doing things, and give young Harry a respect and appreciation for muggles. Then, when the boy got to Hogwarts and saw magic for the first time, he would be suitably amazed and astounded, and Albus would be able to eventually step in and begin teaching Harry all he needed to know, becoming a mentor to the young boy.

The young boy would learn and grow into a great man, a man worthy of taking up the battle against the forces of darkness. Harry would become a shield for the innocent and downtrodden, and if a time ever called for it, the reluctant sword that would be taken up to fight against the darkness when it threatened the peace of the world. In essence, Albus Dumbledore would be making another Albus Dumbledore.

What Albus got was not what he had expected.

Harry Potter was nothing like he had thought he would be. The boy was confident, sure of himself and his actions; he had ambition, intelligence, determination and the courage to push himself forward and make changes that others would never have done or even thought of. Already Harry was being seen as something of a leader to many of the first years and even some of the second and third years looked up to him, while the older students respected him. He was beginning to work on uniting the four houses, something Albus had been trying to do for decades now with no success. It seemed as if the boy did not even need help or guidance, and he was not sure Harry would accept it in any case. The boy was simply too independent to be influenced by others.

To make matters worse was the recent disaster that had happened with the stone this past year. Contrary to popular believe, Albus Dumbledore was not god, nor did he consider himself as such. He did not know everything that went on in this castle, and though he had the ghosts and portraits informing of everything they knew, even they did not see all.

While Albus had known that Voldemort was alive, somewhere, and was after the Philosopher's Stone, he had not realized the man was so close. To have latched onto one of his professors like a parasite, such an unseemly way to live, it was not something he had expected of the Dark Lord. He had believed that Voldemort would have felt such a life was beneath him. It had not occurred to him that in Voldemort's desperation the man would do anything to regain his powers. And it was that thought that had cost Dumbledore the most.

In his arrogance, Dumbledore had believed the Stone would be safe within Hogwarts walls. The millennial old school had some of the brightest minds the Wizarding World had to offer, including himself. Yes, he had thought, Voldemort would be a fool to attempt stealing the Stone while it was at Hogwarts. That belief had cost Dumbledore, not just due to the risk it had placed the students in, but also due to the fact that Harry seemed to have trouble trusting him because of it.

It still made the old Headmaster chuckle to think of how Harry, a first year student albeit one with the talent to be greater than even Dumbledore himself, had scolded him so thoroughly. It had been an

interesting experience and one he was sure not many people had. It had also pleased him to know that Harry seemed to have no trouble thinking of others, that the boy's anger stemmed not from any harm that might have befallen Harry himself, but how Dumbledore's plan to hide the Stone at Hogwarts had put the student population at risk. At the same time it caused some problems for Albus, namely that Harry did not trust him enough to let Albus guide the boy into becoming what the Wizarding World needed.

Voldemort was still alive, and out of all the people in the world, only Albus knew of just how far the man had fallen. Ever since he had discovered that the Dark Lord was alive he had been attempting to figure out how. How was it that Voldemort lived after getting hit with his own curse? A curse that was designed to sever the soul from the body. Dumbledore felt he was close to discovering the answer, but no matter what that answer was, it was just more proof of Voldemort's depravity. Only the foulest kinds of dark magic could allow one to cheat death in such a way.

And now Harry was unlikely to accept Dumbledore's help. His plan to safeguard the stone within Hogwarts had in a way, backfired. The Stone had not been safe at Hogwarts like he had thought it would, it had been nearly taken, and was only saved – in a manner of speaking since the Stone was now destroyed (or so he thought) – because of Harry Potter. And now they were at odds. He had felt the righteous anger the boy had thrown at him, nothing at all like the Dark Lord who was just angry at everything and nothing. In fact, Dumbledore had been very much reminded of the many times when Lily Potter gotten angry at James during their time at Hogwarts.

However, this meant that a rift had opened between him and Harry before they could even build a bridge. How was he to train the boy if said boy thought Dumbledore was incompetent enough to place an item like the Philosopher's Stone at Hogwarts? Or worse, what if the boy assumed Dumbledore had been manipulating events for his own purposes? He had seen in the boy's eyes, the distrust Harry had for him after that incident. It was well hidden, but one who had lived as long as Albus had could pick up on these things even when others tried to hide it.

Yes, Albus decided, things were not going his way, and it would likely take some effort to gain Harry's trust.



"What do you think Fawkes?" he asked his familiar. "Should I adopt a wait and see approach, or should I try and take a more active roll in Harry's life?" Fawkes looked at his partner and let out a light, trilling sound that would sooth any troubled soul. Albus Dumbledore smiled as he began deciding on the best way to help gain Harry's trust. It would take a bit of work, but nothing worth doing was ever supposed to be easy.

XoX

"Your training is finished," Nicholas Flamel told Harry after witnessing the young boys most recent accomplishment. "It's only been two months, but I am both surprised and pleased to tell you that you have gained the title of apprentice in alchemy." Truth be told he was more than surprised by how quickly the boy got alchemy down, it was much harder than other magic disciplines.

"Thank you, Nicholas," Harry said with a smile. It had been extremely fun learning with the famed alchemist. He had learned much in his time at the Flamel estate, and if there was anything Harry loved doing more then anything else, it was learning new and exciting ways to utilize magic.

The old alchemist shook his head as he looked at the transmutation circle and the bronze statue of himself, having been transmuted from a chrome bar. "Two months," he muttered and shook his head again.

He turned back to Harry and held out his hand, "I suggest you keep practicing, and if you have any questions on alchemy be sure to send me a letter." He gave the raven haired boy a sardonic look, "your owl can find me easily enough."

"How long will it be until you to leave?" asked Harry.

"Not for another two years," he said, "while all of our affairs are in order we still have to make our disappearance look like we died and to do that we need to wait until the elixir of life from the Philosopher's Stone is gone."

Harry nodded, the amount the Flamels had before he came with the stone was enough for two years, so they would wait and then likely 'convince' the muggle police to give them two convicts who were

bound for death's row. A little polyjuice potion and they would have two readymade and disguised cadavers for their disappearance act.

"Thank you, for letting me stay here and learn from you," Harry said. "It's been a pleasure."

"It was actually nice teaching someone like you," Nicholas replied. "I don't think I've ever met someone as devoted and intelligent as you. Who knows, you might even be capable of making your own Philosopher's Stone in time."

"Maybe," Harry replied, even if he was capable of doing so, he wasn't sure he would want to make one. Then again, he may make one just to prove he could. "Anyways, I won't take up any more of your time."

"Time is all I have," Nicholas joked. "But you might want to get back home, thanks to that Angeline girl you haven't been there for two weeks. Who knows what people may think about your absence."

"Right, tell Perennial that I said good bye," Harry said.

"Of course."

Harry nodded as he tapped his mother's wand on the small rock Nicholas had made a portkey with, and soon felt a tug on his stomach as he disappeared. He only stumbled slightly as his feet hit the ground as he entered his room.

Looking around he saw everything was as he left it, no surprise there. Harry had created a powerful notice-me-not charm as soon as he had gotten back from school. No muggle would ever be able to even know about this room, much less enter without Harry's permission.

He noticed the light was just beginning to rise here in England, the time difference between the continent and this island were only about an hour or two time difference.

He shed his wizard robes, leaving himself in a pair of white shorts and a black shirt as he walked out of the door. He came downstairs and saw that the Dursleys were all in the kitchen eating. Ignoring

them he opened the door and walked out, closing it behind him as he began walking down the road.

Entering the park Harry saw that it was abandoned and moved to sit at one of the benches. Lying down he let the breeze cool him off, he had gotten so used to the cooler weather of France that being back here would probably take some getting used to.

An hour after he had entered the park a depressed looking Lisa made her way in as well.

"Lisa!" Harry called over as he stood up.

Lisa looked up and saw who it was, Harry only had a split second before the brunette was on top of him, pounding her fists against his chest.

"You! Stupid! Jerk!" she shouted, "do you know how worried I was! Huh! Just disappearing on me like that! What's your problem Harry!"

"Sorry," Harry apologized, while he had not forgotten about Lisa, his feeling responsible for Angeline's well-being while helping her recover had forced him to stay until she left. He had more or less expected this outcome, even though he didn't like to see his friend like this there wasn't much he could do. "Are you crying?"

"No," Lisa sniffed as she wiped her eyes with her sleeves. When she was sure there were no tears in her eyes she settled on glaring at him, "I hope you plan on making up all that time you were gone with me."

"Of course," said Harry.

"Good," Lisa got off of him and pulled him up, grabbed him by the hand and began dragging him. "The first thing you're going to be doing is taking me shopping."

XoX

The days wore on and Harry was starting to regret telling Lisa he would make it up to her. His childhood friends idea of making up consisted of spending every waking hour with her, doing everything she wanted. This included shopping, going to the movies, playing all

the games she wanted at the park, letting her shop for his clothes and essentially turning him into a dress up doll. He should have known this was what she would do, and now there was nothing he could do about it.

Every time he had tried to tell her no, Lisa would turn on the puppy dog eyes. Somehow, it had gotten even more effective than before. Harry was sure she had been practicing for when he had returned.

Thankfully she had not asked him where he had been, Lisa knew him well enough to know that even her puppy dog eyes couldn't convince him to tell her. In truth it kind of hurt, not telling her about his other life, the life of a wizard. It was the one secret he had always kept from her, to protect her from the world that was hidden from normal people.

"1, 2, 3. 1, 2, 3. Come on, move smoothly from one step to the next," came the voice of Lisa's dance instructor.

Harry sighed, "I feel as if my manliness is dropping." He had no clue how Lisa had roped him into this particular activity. This morning she had come to him with a slightly mischievous grin on her face, it was a look that did not bode well for Harry. He had of course asked her about the look, but she just told him that she had a surprise for him and left it at that.

The next thing he knew Mrs. Crawft was driving them to their very first dance lessons together.

"Are you saying you don't want to learn how to dance with me?" asked Lisa, pouting her lips as she brought crocodile tears to her eyes. "I thought you wanted to make up for leaving me all alone for two weeks without even telling me where you were going?"

"Please don't give me that face," Harry whined, slumping his shoulders pitifully. "I never said I wouldn't..."

"If you don't want me to make this face, then stop complaining," Lisa said.

Harry sighed again as they continued the dance steps they were being taught. Sometime during the school year Lisa had taken up traditional dancing from different eras in time, such as the

renaissance, Greek, Roman and Medieval eras. The dance steps from each era were all different, each one just as complicated as the last. Despite it not being something he was particularly interested in he felt it would be good for him, since pureblood society held a lot of social events that required dancing. He shivered as he remembered his dance with Christine.

Dance classes lasted two hours and afterwards Lisa had Harry take her to McDonalds to get something to eat. The two of them were there for half an hour, eating and talking before Lisa's mom came and picked them up. Harry found himself staring out at the passing Buildings and then trees as they moved out of London.

The moment they got home Lisa ran in through the door shouting, "movie time!" as she grabbed the cartoon 101 Dalmatians. Once she put the movie in the VCR Lisa grabbed Harry by the arm and sat him down on the couch, then sat herself down before laying her head down on his lap.

"You keep doing that and I'm going to feel like a human pillow," said Harry.

"So?" Lisa countered, grabbing one of his hands and placing it on her hair. "You shouldn't complain about having a beautiful girl like me being close to you."

"We're only eleven," Harry groaned, despite his protest he began to gently run his hand through her hair.

"I'm twelve," Lisa said, "and you'll be twelve in like a week."

Harry just rolled his eyes and decided he would be safer not saying anything, once Lisa got her mind on something it was damn near impossible to convince her otherwise.

And so he just sat there while they watched as Cruella kidnapped a lot of puppies. As the movie wound down to its end Harry looked down to see Lisa had fallen asleep. He wrapped one arm around her shoulder and placed his other arm under her legs before standing up, taking her with him. He looked at her and sighed, this happened every time they stayed up late.

"Oh, did she fall asleep again?" asked Mrs. Crawft as Harry walked out of the living room and into the hall.

"Yep," Harry looked at Lisa and chuckled a little, "I guess she never kicked the habit of staying up passed her bedtime."

Mrs. Crawft let out a soft laugh, "well, at least with it being summer we have you to look after her."

"Yeah." Harry walked over to Lisa door and used his good sense of balance to open the door with his foot, pushing lightly before he walked in. Closing the door as he entered the same way, then walking over to the bed he made sure Lisa was asleep before waving his hand with the limited range of movement he had.

The sheets of the bed moved back as if pulled by an unseen hand. Harry bent over and gently set his best friend down, taking off both her boots and socks before pulling the sheets back over her. He made to move but Lisa, as if sensing him leaving grabbed his hand.

Harry blinked for a moment, then pried Lisa's fingers off his hand, holding it in one of his own before setting it down and tucking it under her blanket. He gently brushed some hair from her face before standing up, "night Lisa."

He walked back out of the bedroom, pausing at the door when Lisa mumbled a soft, "night Harry" before smiling and walking out of the door and heading into his own room here.

XoX

Harry sighed as he looked at the sunrise, his freshly washed hair still slightly wet from getting out of the shower. He took a sip of the tea he had made and leaned back in the chair, trying his best to relax before Lisa dragged him to wherever she wanted to today. He had made himself a nice omelet for breakfast and had some Ceylon tea, it never failed to help relax him.

"What are you doing out here?" a tired voice asked, yawning mid-way.

"Just relaxing," Harry turned his head and saw Lisa rubbing her eyes a little, looking for all the world like she just woke up; she was still

wearing her pajamas and her hair was tangled and sticking up in several places. Harry had to stifle a laugh, knowing she wouldn't appreciate his thoughts.

"How you can get up so early is beyond me," Lisa said, yawning again as she plopped down on the chair next to him. She grabbed Harry's mug and took a long gulp of the warm tea. Harry sighed as she did this, the girl always stole his morning tea. For whatever reason, Lisa could never be bothered to make her own.

"I can get up so early because unlike you I'm just a bundle of energy," he smirked, he had actually been able to do some research on why he seemed to have more energy than everyone else. It was apparently one the benefits of being an extra powerful wizard, as well as being an Occlumens, one served to give him more energy and the other organized his mind, meaning he had less to sort through sleep. It was just another thing he could use to his advantage.

She stuck her tongue out at him before taking another sip of his tea. "Do you want me to get you a cup of your own?" he asked.

"No, I'm fine drinking yours," she said, smiling and getting Harry to snort. They were silent for a few minutes before Lisa said, "your birthday is coming up in a few days."

"I take it you want me to do something special?" Harry said with a long suffering sigh. Year after year she would always tried to convince him to do something for his birthday. It wasn't that Harry didn't want to do anything for it, he always enjoyed the times when Lisa and her parents had celebrated his birthday with him. He fondly remembered the first time they had done so. He had accidentally let slip that he had never even received a birthday present, much less celebrated the day of his birth. Lisa had been properly horrified, right before she began yelling about the injustice his aunt and uncle had done in not allowing him to celebrate his birthday.

That year she had dragged him to her house on the day of his birth. She and her parents had planned a small surprise party for him. It had just been them, none of the people he and Lisa hung out with at school had been invited. But that was fine with Harry, knowing that Lisa had cared enough to get her parents to help plan a party had

been more than good enough for him. He enjoyed the small celebration they had on his birthday.

Her mother had made him a cake, and he had received several presents, which he still had in his room. They had played games and stayed up late watching movies. In truth, Harry would admit that the celebration was fun, and it had actually made him feel like a normal, nine year old boy. Not a wizard whose parents had been killed by an evil man with red eyes and a snake like face.

Still, ever since then Lisa had been trying to get him to have a party and invite all of their friends from school. Personally, Harry had no desire to do so and so far had yet to budge on the matter.

"I don't know why you don't like celebrating your birth," Lisa commented.

"I guess I just don't see the point," Harry shrugged.

"Uh...because its when you were born?" she said sarcastically. "Seriously, Harry, you have some major issues."

"Hmm, maybe," he admitted.

"Definitely," Lisa confirmed, now that she was more awake from the tea she had drank from Harry's cup she stood up and stretched. "Well, I'm going to take a shower, then you, me and my parents are going to sit down and plan out your party."

"My – what do you mean?" asked Harry. Lisa, however, just ignored him and walked back inside. "Hey! Lisa! What do you mean plan my party! I don't want a party!"

XoX

"Why did I go along with you?" asked Harry with a long suffering sigh as he watched all of the people from his school running around the arcade that Lisa had somehow convinced her parents to rent out for his birthday. Damn those puppy eyes of hers.

Lisa had gotten her parents to sit down with Harry and discuss his plans for his party. Discussing being a relatives term, as Harry had not been allowed to actually make any decision concerning what



kind of party to have. Of course, were up to him, there would not have been a party so that may have had something to do with his lack of being allowed to make any decisions.

The last two days before his party had been spent with the family of three (even Lisa's dad had gotten in on it) dragging Harry to every party store in London, as they bought all kinds of decorations, banners, poppers, plates, cups, utensils, glow sticks and essentially anything else they thought would liven up the party. Half of the stuff they had bought Harry thought would likely not even be used.

The venue they had chosen was an arcade/pizza parlor located in several miles away from their home, the only place they had found that seemed large enough to house the amount of people who had been invited. Lisa had gotten her parents to send out invitations to all of the people she and Harry knew from school. That equaled nearly fifty people.

Some of them hadn't made it, but the entire football team, several of Lisa's female friends, and at least ten of the people Harry used to hang out with at school had come. Harry was actually surprised by the number of people who had showed up, he had never really celebrated his birthday before and it had been at least a year since he had seen any of these people.

"Hey, Harry! You're not supposed to just sit there, are you?" Lisa complained, stepping in front of him and placing her hands on her hips as she glared at him.

Harry sighed and took a drink of his soda, "I'm not really interested in playing video games." His own life was more exciting than any video game. After all, facing a Dark Lord in real life was far more heart stopping than fighting a video game Dark Lord. Yes, Harry Potter had more than enough excitement in his life that arcade games didn't do much for him.

"So?" she asked, grabbing his arm and pulled him up, despite his protest. "Everyone came here so they could celebrate your birthday! Now get up and do something!"

"Fine, fine, quit nagging," Harry grumbled. He began walking around, looking for something to do at this place. There were many games, boxing games, shooters, racing, they even had some new dancing

game that a few of the girls were getting into. As he looked around before finding one of the shooter games and decided to play it.

For the rest of his time there Harry did his best to enjoy himself, partly for fear of Lisa terrorizing him for the next week if he didn't but also because he figured he was already there and might as well have as much fun as possible.

He did his best to allot some time with all of the people who showed up, playing shooter and racing games with the guys and even trying the dance game the girls had been enjoying. He played several games that earned him tickets and thanks to his reflexes and hand to eye coordination was able to earn enough to buy one of the more expensive prizes, a gun that shot air soft darts.

When it was time for everyone to eat they had several different types of pizza, cheese, pepperoni, sausage and vegetarian along with various kinds of coke. After wards they had cake, a rather embarrassing affair for Harry since everyone sang happy birthday to him. It wasn't as bad as the Hogwarts song, but all the people around him were still horribly off pitch.

After they had all had their fill of dessert Lisa began grabbing presents and shoved them in Harry's face, ordering him to open them. All of the presents were fairly varied, from the football team he got a set of combat training equipment, gloves, foot wear and head gear, it was one of the more expensive sets due to how new it was and the fact that it wasn't bulky like the normal kind. From the girls he had gotten several books, mostly history, but also a few action, sci-fi and romance books that they all thought he would like.

The most impressive gift was from Lisa and her parents, who had gotten him a computer. They said it was for his school, Harry didn't have the heart to tell them electronics didn't work at Hogwarts, unless he told them about magic they wouldn't understand. So he simply gave them a hug and accepted it with his thanks.

When the party was done Harry went with Lisa and her family who drove him home.

"Are you sure you don't want us to help you carry everything in?" asked Lisa, though what she really wanted to ask was 'are you sure you want to even go home?'.

Harry nodded, hefted the computer on his shoulder and the box of other presents under his other arm. "Yeah, I'm good thanks though," he said.

"So...I'll see you tomorrow, right?" asked Lisa shyly.

Harry looked at her strangely but nodded, "of course."

"Key," Lisa looked away for a moment before looking back at him. "Happy birthday, Harry."

"Thanks Lisa, I –"

He stopped when she pressed her lips to his cheek, a moment later they left and Lisa ran into car. She didn't look at him after that so Harry completely missed the large blush forming on her face.

Mr. Crawft looked slightly upset while Mrs. Crawft said, "oh dear, looks like our little Lisa might be getting a crush."

"Mom!" came a shout from the back.

"We'll see you later, Harry," she said, smiling as she ignored her daughters grumbles.

Harry frowned as they drove off. Shaking his head he made his way to the front door and set down his box of presents, took out his key and unlocked the door. Stepping in he picked up his presents again before pushing the door open with his foot, and closing it the same way when he got on the other side. He thanked his sensei for his training, otherwise he would have made a fool of himself trying to carry all the presents he had and multi-tasking with his feet.

He attempted to make his way upstairs without alerting the rest of the family, but apparently wasn't quiet enough because Vernon opened the door from the living room a moment later and glared at him. "What do you think you're doing boy?" he hissed quietly.

"I just got back from my birthday party that Lisa and her parents set up for me," Harry said, blinking at the man. This was odd, Vernon

normally tried to ignore him, for the most part at least. Why was he getting all pissy now?

"Well keep quiet," Vernon said, "I'm trying to set up a deal and I can't do that with your freakishness around."

Raising an eyebrow Harry looked around the fat, whale of a man to see an Asian couple, Japanese, judging by their general stature and the different slant of their eyes. He noticed them looking at him and looked back at Vernon, "in Japan, family is considered more important than anything else. Just tell them you're taking care of your orphaned nephew and they'll think you're the most honorable man in the world."

Harry left Vernon blinking at him in confusion, making his way upstairs to his room where he closed the door behind him. He set his stuff down and looked towards his bed, only to freeze at seeing something already on it.

Standing on his bed, with large bat-like ears and bulging tennis ball eyes was a House elf. There were other things he noticed about this House elf, it was a lot skinnier than the ones he had met at Hogwarts, and its attire was disgusting. The elf was wearing what amounted to a large, dirty and torn sack, definitely not something the distinguished house elves of Hogwarts would wear.

While he was wondering what a house elf was doing in his room, said creature slipped off the bed and bowed so low that the end of its long, thin nose touched the carpet.

"Can I help you?" asked Harry, deciding nonchalance was the best course of action.

"Harry Potter!" said the creature in a high-pitched voice Harry was sure would carry down the stairs. "So long has Dobby wanted to meet you, sir ... Such an honor it is . . . ."

"Riiight," Harry drawled, eying the House elf warily. "So...what's your name?"

"Dobby, sir. Just Dobby. Dobby the house-elf," said the creature.

"Well, just Dobby," Harry started as he pulled out his mother's wand and cast a silencing charm on his room before flipping his chair around and conjuring another chair. "Why don't you take a seat and tell me why your hear?"

a second later Harry congratulated himself on his forethought in casting a silencing charm, the moment he told the House elf to take a seat it began to cry, loudly.

"S-sit down!" he wailed. "Never ... never ever. . . "

"Um... are you, alright?" asked Harry unsurely, he wasn't quite sure what to make of this creatures crying. None of the House-elves at Hogwarts had been like this when he had talked to them.

"Such a great person, Harry Potter is!" choked the elf. "Dobby has never been asked to sit down by a wizard - like an equal - and now Harry Potter is asking him if he is alright."

"Uh huh," Harry grinned at the little elf, "well then, you can't have met many decent wizards then."

"No, I haven't I –" Dobby shook his head. Then, without warning, he leapt up and started banging his head furiously on the window, shouting, "Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!"

Harry gaped at the little elf for a split second before flicking his wand, suddenly the little creature was floating in the air, far away from the wall, or anything else it may bash its head on. "What do you think your doing?" Harry asked incredulously. "Wait – don't answer that, I don't want to know. Before you do anything else, calm down... good. Now, if I let you down, are you going to continue making a mess of my room?"

The little elf shook its head and Harry sat him down.

"So, why were you hitting yourself?" asked Harry.

"Dobby had to punish himself, sir," said the elf, who had gone slightly cross-eyed. "Dobby almost spoke ill of his family, sir..."

"Your family, huh?" That was interesting, so the wizarding family this Dobby served obviously wasn't a very good one. That was potentially useful should he find out who they were.

"The wizard family Dobby serves, sir... DOBBY'S is a houseelf - bound to serve one house and one family forever..."

"I'm taking it they don't know your here?" Harry said, making it sound like a question. In truth it was fairly easy to deduct just from the little elf's actions.

"Oh, no, sir, no ... Dobby will have to punish himself most grievously for coming to see you, sir. Dobby will have to shut his ears in the oven door for this. If they ever knew, sir \_"

"But won't they notice if you shut your ears in the oven door."

"Dobby doubts it, sir. Dobby is always having to punish himself for something, sir. They lets Dobby get on with it, sir. Sometimes they reminds me to do extra punishments..."

"And a house elf can only be freed by their master presenting clothes," Harry said, more to himself than anyone else. "Or until they die."

"That is correct sir," Dobby said.

"Hmmm..." Harry tilted his head to one side in thought. "You know, if you tell which family you belong to I may be able to help you."

This was apparently the wrong thing to say as Dobby dissolved again into wails of gratitude. Harry sighed and waited the cries out, yes, it was definitely a good idea for him to set up that silencing charm.

"Harry Potter asks if he can help Dobby ... Dobby has heard of your greatness, sir, but of your goodness, Dobby never knew..."

"Right, well I hope you didn't hear about my greatness from all of those books people have written about me," he commented lightly. "Because there all pretty much rubbish. Once I get old enough to hire a solicitor I'll be sueing them for making money by telling lies about me."

"I-Harry Potter is humble and modest," said Dobby reverently, his orb- like eyes aglow. "Harry Potter speaks not of his triumph over He-Who- Must-Not-Be-Named -"

"Voldemort." said Harry.

Dobby clapped his hands over his bat ears and moaned, "Ah, speak not the name, sir! Speak not the name!"

"Don't tell me your afraid of a name too?" Harry said. "It's just a name, even my friends can't stand hearing me call him that." Thoughts of his friends brought a frown to his face, he had yet to hear from any of them, even after trying to send a letter with Hedwig. Whenever the owl would receive a letter it would inexplicably disappear sometime during her flight. It had been bothering Hedwig something feirce.

"Dobby heard tell," he said hoarsely, "that Harry Potter met the Dark Lord for a second time just weeks ago ... that Harry Potter escaped yet again."

"Well, that is true," Harry admitted, "old snake face and I did have another row at Hogwarts last year."

Dobby's eyes suddenly shone with tears. "Ah, sir," he gasped, dabbing his face with a corner of the grubby pillowcase he was wearing. "Harry Potter is valiant and bold! He has braved so many dangers already! But Dobby has come to protect Harry Potter, to warn him, even if he does have to shut his ears in the oven door later... Harry Potter must not go back to Hogwarts." There was a silence broken only by the chink of knives and forks from downstairs and the distant rumble of Uncle Vernon's voice.

"Excuse me?" asked Harry after several minutes of staring. "Not go back to Hogwarts? Are you out of your mind? I have to go back, I need to learn more about magic."

"No, no, no," squeaked Dobby, shaking his head so hard his ears flapped. "Harry Potter must stay where he is safe. He is too great, too good, to lose. If Harry Potter goes back to Hogwarts, he will be in mortal danger."

"Mortal danger?" Harry was a tad confused, but considering last year, he wouldn't be surprised if something bad happened at school this year as well. Oh well, at least this time he was being warned about it.

"There is a plot, Harry Potter. A plot to make most terrible things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry this year," whispered Dobby, suddenly trembling all over. "Dobby has known it for months, sir. Harry Potter must not put himself in peril. He is too important, sir!"

"Personally, I don't think I'm all that important," Harry said, neglecting to think of the prophecy. "So...who's the one making this plot?"

Dobby made a funny choking noise and then banged his head frantically against the wall.

"Judging by how you're banging your head against the wall, I'd have to say your master is the one making this plot," Harry commented.

Dobby immediately stopped his banging and looked at Harry wide eyed.

"It is, isn't it?" said Harry, he did his best to keep a smirk off his face. "Ok, how about this, I'll ask you some questions, and you just nod your head if I'm right and shake it if I'm wrong. That way you won't be telling me anything and it shouldn't be going against your master. Is that acceptable?"

Slowly, tentatively, Dobby nodded his head.

"Ok then, does this plot have anything to do with Voldemort?" asked Harry. Dobby made a shrill squeal and Harry groaned. "Listen, I don't care if you or anyone else fears that name, I'm not going to give the snake faced bastard anymore power. You don't have to say his name, but if it makes you uncomfortable for me too then you're just going to have to do your best to ignore it. Now, does he have anything to do with this?"

Dobby shook his head. "Not -not He- Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, sir," But Dobby's eyes were wide and he seemed to be trying to give Harry a hint. Harry narrowed his eyes in slight thought. This plot,



whatever it is, may have something to do with Voldemort indirectly. He would need more information to be sure.

"He hasn't got a brother, has he?" asked Harry jokingly. Dobby shook his head, his eyes wider than ever.

"So if Voldemort is not involved, at least not directly, then that means one of his Death Eaters is," Harry mumbled. He looked at Dobby with an intense gaze, "which means your master is likely the Death Eater involved in this plot at the school. Still, this person will also have Dumbledore to deal with, you know who Dumbledore is, don't you?"

Dobby bowed his head. "Albus Dumbledore is the greatest headmaster Hogwarts has ever had. Dobby knows it, sir. Dobby has heard Dumbledore's powers rival those of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named at the height of his strength. But, sir" - Dobby's voice dropped to an urgent whisper - "there are powers Dumbledore doesn't ... powers no decent wizard..."

And before Harry could stop him, Dobby bounded off the chair, seized Harry's desk lamp, and started beating himself around the head with earsplitting yelps. Resisting the urge to smack Dobby around himself, Harry flicked his wand, separating the lamp from the obviously deranged House elf and once again, floating him into the air.

"Are we going to have to go through this again?" asked Harry. "I don't want you breaking your face on my stuff, it can't be healthy for you. Now, I think you've answered all of my questions." At least, all of the ones he was sure Dobby would answer. He didn't think the house elf would be able to tell him much more, but now he knew that some kind of plot would be going on at Hogwarts, something that could potentially endanger the school. Harry decided he would simply have to be on his toes and do some more training.

Maybe he'd make an obstacle course in the forest.

"Does this mean Harry Potter won't be going back to Hogwarts?" asked Dobby in his squeaky voice.

"What? No? I have to go back," Harry said, "especially with what you've told me. If there's a plot going on I have to be there to stop it, and to protect my friends from getting hurt."

"Friends who don't even write to Harry Potter." said Dobby slyly.

Harry stopped breathing for all of two seconds as he stared at the little elf. "How do you know my friends haven't been writing to me?" he asked suspiciously, his eyes narrowing.

Dobby shuffled his feet. "Harry Potter mustn't be angry with Dobby. Dobby did it for the best - "

"Have you been stopping my letters."

"Dobby has them here, sir," said the elf. He pulled a thick wad of envelopes from the inside of the pillowcase he was wearing. Harry could make out Hermione's neat writing, along with the nice cursive of Hannah and the slightly scrawled scribbling of Neville. He could also catch a glimpse of the others, Blaise, Daphne, Tracey, Susan, Padme, Lisa and even Tonks.

Before Dobby had the opportunity to do anything Harry's wand was making several swishing motions, the little house elf suddenly found himself floating in the air, and all of the letters flew towards Harry.

"I can't believe you've been blocking my mail," Harry growled, he and Hedwig had been wondering what the hell was going on. Hedwig had been particularly distressed since whenever she got a letter it would seemingly disappear sometime during transit.

He would have never thought that a house elf would be stealing his letters, but now it made sense as he remembered how the food would appear on the tables in the Great Hall. Harry didn't know what was different about a house elf's magic from a human's, but he knew that no human could teleport things like food and what not. Summon, yes. But not teleport, which was what they seemed capable of doing.

"Dobby did not mean to make Harry Potter angry," Dobby said in a small voice.

"You thought that if I didn't receive any letters from my friends that I would be less inclined to return," said Harry. "Trust me I know what

you were trying to do." And Lisa said all the history and psychology books he read were useless. "That still doesn't make it right, and what could possibly possess you to believe I would stop going just because people didn't write to me?"

Dobby blinked several times, seemingly at a loss for words at Harry's comment.

"Even if they hadn't written me I would still go back to Hogwarts," Harry played around with his mother's wand. He had kept it in pristine condition. "Both of my parents were magical, and so am I. On top of that I somehow managed to defeat the darkest lord in a century, but he's not dead. If I don't learn to control and use my magic, Voldemort will likely find some way to kill me. So you see, I need to go to Hogwarts regardless of the danger."

"Harry Potter is so brave," Dobby said with admiration in his eyes. "Willing to risk himself despite the dangers. However, Harry Potter must not go to Hogwarts."

"I will be going back to Hogwarts," Harry said, narrowing his eyes at the little elf.

"Then Dobby will do what he must, to protect Harry Potter," Dobby stood up but before he could go anywhere Harry had his wand out, and had bound and levitated him.

"I wouldn't think of trying to do something...foolish," Harry said threateningly. "Even if you were to cause a ruckus and attempt to get me in trouble with my relatives or the Ministry it won't matter. I've been using magic for years and I'll simply disapparate to somewhere else. Do not test my patience with this."

Dobby gulped.

"I'm going to let you go," said Harry, "but I want your word on your honor as a house elf that you will not try anything and simply leave." When it looked like Dobby wouldn't budge, Harry went with a different route. "If you don't agree I will simply keep you here, stunned and bound. Then the family you serve will get angry and you'll have to explain where you were when I do release you."

Dobby's eyes widened and he shook his head.

"Give me your word that you won't do anything to get me in trouble," said Harry.

Dobby's shoulders slumped, "I give you my word that I, Dobby will not do anything to get Harry Potter sir in trouble."

"Good man," Harry flicked his wand, setting the elf back on the chair and dispelling the ropes he had been bound in. "I do appreciate your warning, but I think you should leave now."

The house elf looked at Harry before disappearing with a soft crack. He put the elf's warning out of his mind for now, there wasn't much he could do at home. He would just have to be prepared when he got to Hogwarts.

XoX

Here we are, not much to say about this chapter. It's basically setting up the story for when Harry gets to Hogwarts. I fixed up the French in chapter 2 so it's not an atrocious mockery of the language.

Pokemaster12 out.

## Chapter 5: Shopping and Cradle Robbing

XoX

Lucius Malfoy stood by his wife in Diagon Alley, watching as Narcissa doted over their son. He had just gotten his son fitted with a new set of robes and were now on their way to begin buying the necessary books for the boys Hogwarts classes. "Narcissa dear," he called to get his wife's attention.

"Yes Lucius?" she said, turning away from where she had been doting on her son to look at him.

"Why don't you go and get Draco's potion ingredients," Lucius gave Narcissa a look that she recognized. The blond woman nodded before giving her husband a kiss on the cheek and heading over to the potion shop. "Draco, come with me," he commanded, walking along without waiting to see if his son was following.

"Where are we going father?" asked Draco as he fell in step with the older Malfoy.

"Borgin and Burkes, and while we're going there, I want you to tell me what you know of Harry Potter."

"Why would you want to know of him?" asked Draco, wrinkling his nose in distaste. "There's nothing special about that filthy half-blood..."

"Draco," Lucius said with a slight edge to his tone. "Do not let your hatred of the Potter boy cloud your judgment. Now tell me about Potter."

"Well..." Draco started slowly, working his mouth as he tried to decide what he wanted to say. "He got top marks in all classes for the year, of course, I could have been on top if I had wanted to be." Lucius rolled his eyes at his son's bragging.

"What about politically?"

"Politically?" asked Draco, looking at his father for a few seconds before he understood what Lucius meant. "Well, he's pretty popular, most of the first years in Ravenclaw, Gryffindor and Hufflepuff look

up to him, I guess. And he has a lot of friends from those three houses. Some of the Slytherin's even seem to respect him," Draco scowled. "I don't know why though, filthy half-blood was insulting the Dark Lord. Anyways, he has three friends in Slytherin, Zabini, Greengrass and Davis..."

"Zabini and Greengrass you say?" Lucius asked, looking interested. The Zabini's were a powerful pureblood family that hailed from Italy, most of the members still lived there. Celestina Zabini's father and the last Head of House before dying from the Dragon pox epidemic that had hit a few decades ago, had moved to Britain in order to expand their families influence. Despite being looked down upon as a woman, she was very well respected due to the amount of money she possessed.

Greengrass on the other hand was a well respected pureblood family. They were neither ancient or noble, but David Greengrass, the grandfather of the current Head of House, had been the one to build the Greengrass name into what it was now.

Both families were considered neutral-bordering on dark. If Harry Potter had their backing it could cause him trouble.

"Do any others in Slytherin support him?" Lucius asked his son.

Draco frowned. "I know that a few of the older students respect him, but they mostly keep to themselves. Myself and the others have been doing what we can to keep the rest of the Slytherin's in line but its getting harder." By others he meant the other children who had Death Eater father's. "Several have actually been thinking about going to the All House Common Room."

Lucius turned an eye on his son. "And that is?"

"A common room for all of the Houses to go to," Draco said, not bothering to hide his scowl. "Potter made it before Christmas, many students from the other three houses go there. So far I've been able to convince the others not to go there, except for Zabini, Greengrass and Davis."

"Davis... I know that name," Lucius muttered.

"Father?" said Draco, looking at his dad who had a look of deep contemplation on his face.

"I believe there is a way to blunt Potters power in Slytherin," Lucius said after a moment. Yes, the plan he was ready to put into place should do nicely in destroying the Potter boy just as much as it would those damn Weasleys. He spoke to his son again moments later. "Do not worry about him anymore, I have a plan that should get rid of Potter before the end of next year. Instead, do your best to keep the other Slytherin's from straying out of line."

"Yes father." Draco nodded his head, curious, but knowing better then to ask what his father had planned.

XoX

It took an entire day for Harry to finish going through all of the letters and respond to his friends. He had gotten several letters from Blaise, Daphne, Hannah, Hermione, Lisa, Neville, Susan, Padme and Tracey, even Tonks had managed to send him a letter to tell him about how her auror training was going.

Most of the letters sent contained the standard information one would expect to find in a letter, his friends asking about him, how he was doing, what he was up to and a few invites over to visit. Some of them were so late that it wouldn't matter if he replied or not. Still he replied to some of the more recent letters.

Several of the letters he had gotten were birthday cards, the ones from his friends in wizarding families the cards were actually expanded in order to stow presents in them. From Blaise he had gotten a rare book on dueling, Tracey had given him a wand cleaning kit, Susan and Hannah had pooled their money and gotten him an expensive looking broom cleaning kit, Neville got him several rare herbal potion ingredients, Padme and Lisa had found an old book on magic theory. Daphne's gift had been the biggest surprise, a charmed journal that would allow him to talk with her via another journal that was linked to it.

Harry picked up the journal and studied it, it was a fairly standard looking old style book with a red and gold leather cover, on the front was the Potter family crest and below that was the Hogwarts coat of arms. A shield with a Lion, a snake, a badger and a raven.

He opened the journal to the first page, it was blank. Picking up the letter again, Harry read:

Dear Harry,

I hope this gets to you, none of the letters I've sent have been answered, Blaise and Tracey seem to be having the same problem getting a hold of you. It's odd, I've managed to receive the letter you sent and sent ones in return but you never got back. And your owl is pretty smart so I doubt she would lose it.

I wanted to wish you a happy birthday, although I wish you would have told me when your birthday was. Anyways, I wanted to get you something for you but couldn't figure out what (Your very hard to shop for for some reason). I decided that, rather than buy you some expensive trinket, I would get you something that you can use.

This journal inside the envelope is a specially charmed journal, it has an ever-lasting-page charm on it, so you will never have to worry about running out of pages. But more importantly, this journal is linked to another one that's in my possession. Whenever you write something, just write Daphne at the end of your writing and it will get sent to my journal. I thought it might be a nice way for us to keep in touch.

I hope you like it.

Love,

Daphne Greengrass,

Heiress to the House of Greengrass.

Harry smiled before grabbing a calligraphy pen and writing in the journal.

Hey, Daphne! You there? I wanted to thank you for the gift, to be honest I had not expected you or anyone else to buy me presents for my birthday. So thank you. I hope your summer has been going well, and I do apologize for not getting any of your letters, it seems someone was blocking my mail. Have you done anything fun for this summer?



Harry waited a few minutes and when no responses were forthcoming went back to looking through some of his letters. There were a few from Hagrid that he figured he would go through at his leisure.

As he was sorting through the few he had yet to read Harry found an envelope with the Hogwarts school crest on it. That meant it was likely his new book list. Opening it up Harry scanned through the list of books he needed to buy. He would go shopping for them tomorrow.

XoX

The next morning Harry had just gotten out of the shower after his morning workout when he found the journal Daphne had gotten him vibrating. Walking over to his desk, Harry picked up the journal and opened it to the first page.

Harry! Hey, Harry! Pick up the journal.

Harry blinked for a moment before sitting down in his chair and opening the top drawer on the left of his desk, pulling out a calligraphy pen. He began to write:

Hey Daph.

He waited for a moment before watching as words began to write themselves onto the page. The handwriting was a very neat and artistic cursive, easily recognizable as Daphne's handwriting.

Harry? Thank Merlin! Do you know how long everyone has been waiting for hear from you?

Sorry, I had some trouble with receiving people's mail. It seems that a house elf was taking my mail from Hedwig somehow before she could return home with it.

A house elf? That's the worst lie I've ever heard, Harry. Seriously, you can do better than that.

I'm not lying. A house elf named Dobby had been stealing my mail, he appeared in my house last night and told me not to go to

Hogwarts this year. Apparently he thought that if I thought none of my friends wanted to speak to me I would not want to go back.

There was a long pause before more writing appeared.

You're not lying to me?

Have I ever lied to you?

No, but what your telling me sounds so far-fetched.

I know, believe me, I understand how weird that sounds. According to this house elf, something bad is going to happen at Hogwarts.

What was the House elf's name?

Dobby.

Another pause.

Can't say I've ever heard of this Dobby. It likely belongs to one of the darker pureblood families, like the Malfoys, Notts and Parkinsons.

That was my thought too. So how are you?

I'm good, Summer was kind of boring, I didn't do much other than spend time with my sister, she'll be going to Hogwarts two years from now. Not much has happened.

Didn't you spend any time with Tracey and Blaise?

No... father doesn't like me going out anymore.

Well that just sucks.

Tell me about it. It's been nearly four years since he let me go anywhere, I used to sneak out but he caught onto it and now he actually placed bars on my window.

You know, that sounds like something my relatives would do if they had the chance.

Are they really that bad?

Bad enough. So have you already gone shopping for your books?

Yes, a few days ago.

Oh...and here I was hoping to catch you shopping so I could join you, your really dad won't let you go out?

I could at ask...hold on a second...

Harry leaned back in his chair as he waited for Daphne, he looked over at his list of books and decided to make some notes about the books that he would get for his own independent study again. He planned on working on his alchemy, he wanted to become a journeymen before the end of the year so he would need books on the subject. They were fairly rare but he would likely be able to find them at the small antique store he got Rowena's journal from.

His journal began vibrating again and he looked at it.

He said no. It's not that surprising, though it is a little depressing.

Well that really sucks. I guess I'll see you on the Hogwarts Express then?

Of course.

By Daph.

I'll see you later, Harry.

Harry closed his journal and placed it in the middle drawer, closing it before he stood up. Walking over to his closet and opening it up to choose his attire for the day, he selected a pair of black slacks, a red shirt and then threw a hooded robe over it.

Walking back out of his closet Harry dissaparated without a sound.

XoX

Harry looked at the list as he walked down the main street of Diagon Alley, the top said the same thing as always, catch the Hogwarts Express at Kings Cross. The books he needed were:

Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2, by Miranda Goshawk.

Break with a Banshee, by Gilderoy Lockheart.

Gadding with Ghouls, by Gilderoy Lockheart.

Holidays with Hags, by Gilderoy Lockheart.

Travels with Trolls, by Gilderoy Lockheart.

Voyages with Vampires, by Gilderoy Lockhart.

Wanderings with Werewolves, by Gilderoy Lockhart.

And Year with the Yeti, by Gilderoy Lockhart.

Harry wondered who in their right mind would require students to buy all those books, he had not read any of Lockheart's work, but even if they were the best source of information available there was no way anyone with the exception of him and maybe Hermione that all of these books would get read in one year. The books were also very expensive, at least 3,000 galleons for the entire lot.

Shaking the thoughts off Harry made his way over to Madam Malkin's, his old robes no longer fit as he had grown a bit over the summer. Because there were quite a few students getting fitted for new robes, Harry was forced to wait for around fifteen minutes before one of Madam Malkin's aids was able to help him.

"Hello..." the aid, a girl with dark brown hair and gray eyes greeted with a smile. However her voice trailed off the moment she got a glimpse of who she was talking to. Harry was thankful when the girl seemed to pull herself together in order to maintain her professional decorum, at least as much as was possible after gawking at one of her customers. With a small blush of embarrassment she said, "how may I help you?"

"I need new robes," Harry said, "I seem to have outgrown my old ones." It wasn't much, about an inch or so of growth, but it was enough that his robes were slightly uncomfortable. He absently wished the Wizarding World wasn't stuck in the 16th Century as the seamstress aid got down to business.

"Of course, just come over here and we'll get you fitted," she said, directing him to one of the stools. It only took about fifteen minutes to get his measurements down, when it was done Harry ordered six sets of robes, three in plain black, one in green and two dress robes, both in black.

"It will take a few days to get all of your order," the girl commented.

"That's fine," Harry said, "I don't need them right away." As he was making to pay the girl, he felt someone bump into him, causing him to stumble slightly.

"Oh, sorry," came a feminine voice from behind him. He turned around as the speaker continued, "I didn't see you – Harry?"

Harry blinked as he found himself staring into a face with a pair of dark blue eyes and a growing smile. "Uh, Christine, right?" he asked, not liking that smile at all.

"I'm so glad you remembered," she said, wrapping her arms around one of his. Thanks to his time with Angeline, Harry was distinctly aware of the breasts that were pressing against him. He did his best not to blush but it seemed to be in vain, as the girl's smile told him she had noticed. "So did you have a good summer?"

"Uh, yeah," he tried his best not to shiver, this girl was nice enough but she seriously freaked him out. "It was... alright, how about yours?"

"It was boring," Christine said, before a pout crossed her face. "I had been hoping you would come over to visit, but I never saw you."

"Erm... sorry?" he said, the tone in his voice unsure.

"Well I suppose it's ok since you're here. Now come on, let's go find Mum and Blaise while you tell me about your summer," Christine said as she began pulling Harry out of the shop, completely ignoring the girl who he had been about to pay.

"But I –"

"Don't worry, you'll be able to go back to your shopping later," she said dismissively before giving him a seductive pout. "Don't you want to spend more time with me?" she asked.

Harry looked at her with a look that distinctly said no, he did not really want to spend time with her. If it weren't for the fact that he had been taught to treat woman with respect, there was a much higher possibility of him telling her just how much she scared him, instead of how he wanted to spend time with her. As it was all the raven haired boy was able to get out was, "Uh, well –"

"Great!" she interrupted, he doubted she was even really listening to him. "So tell me about your summer, and don't leave anything out." Harry resisted the rising urge to give an exasperated sigh before complying with her request/demand. He didn't tell her too much, leaving out his time in France since he did not want anyone to know he had studied alchemy under Nicholas Flamel, but he did tell her about everything else.

Christine looked like she was listening with rapt attention as he told her about how he and his best friend Lisa went to several muggle amusement parks or went shopping, watched movies at the cinema and many other activities. "So this Lisa than, is she your girlfriend?" asked Christine with an odd inflection in her voice. It held a dangerous note to it that made Harry shiver in fear for his muggle friend.

"No," said Harry, he eyed the older girl warily. "She's my best friend and the closest thing I have to a sister, besides I'm much too young to be thinking about dating." Harry wondered why a lot of the girls he knew, especially the older ones, were so interested in whether or not he was in a romantic relationship with anyone. He was only twelve for Merlin's sake!

"Good," Christine chirped decisively, her cheery voice and attitude coming back as if it had never left. "Though, I don't think twelve is too young to start thinking about the kind of girl you want to be with."

"What?" As he stared at the older girl, Harry couldn't help but wonder if she was bi-polar, or had some other mental dysfunction that caused random swings in her disposition.

"Nothing, oh look! There's mum and Blaise," she said, waving at Blaise and the woman who only looked slightly older than her daughter. She quickly called out to the two to catch their attention, "Mum! Blaise! Look who I found!"

"Oh my, Harry?" asked Celestina, giving him a pleasant smile. "What a coincidence meeting you here."

"The pleasure is all mine Celest," said Harry, the beautiful Italian woman gave him a large smile at hearing the name she had asked him to call her. "You're looking as beautiful as ever," he then turned to his dark skinned friend, "Blaise, did you have a good summer?"

"It wasn't bad," Blaise said with a mild shrug, "a little boring compared to school to be honest." Both his mother and sister snickered at his way of saying he missed his friends, earning a glare from the dark skinned boy.

"You mean it wasn't as fun without all of us getting into some kind of trouble," Harry said with a small grin.

"More like not as fun when I was watching you get into all kinds of trouble," Blaise shot back with a smirk.

"Well, hang around me long enough and we'll be able to correct that slight oversight," said Harry.

"And what about you?" asked Blaise, ignoring Harry's last comment. "Aside from a few letters none of us had heard anything about until yesterday, I had to listen to Tracey rant about how you weren't returning any of her letters."

"I had a house elf blocking my mail," Harry said with a sigh.

Blaise quirked an eyebrow up in curiosity, "a house elf?"

"Yeah, he called himself Dobby," said Harry.

"You mean to tell me, a house elf, was stealing your letters," Blaise said incredulously. "Do you really think I'm stupid enough to believe that?"

"You honestly think I would lie about this?" asked Harry, raising an eyebrow. "I know how it sounds, but its the truth."

"House elves don't steal people's mail," Blaise said, "unless ordered to."

"He could have been ordered to do that," said Harry, lying since he did not want his friend to know there may be danger at Hogwarts without knowing exactly what kind of danger it was. "Did you ever think of that?"

"Dobby?" Celestina questioned, tapping one delicate finger against her chin as she looked up at the sky for a moment.

"Do you recognize that name, Celest?" asked Harry, looking over at the woman. If she knew Dobby belonged to he may be able to blunt what ever plan said owner was concocting before it even began.

"It does sound somewhat familiar..." Celestine shook her head, her dark and curly black hair sway behind her. "Unfortunately, I can't remember where I've heard that name before."

"That's alright," Harry said, shrugging. He looked over at Blaise and smirked, "see, I told you? How could I have known the name of a house elf that your mum knows when she's the only pureblood whose house I've been too."

"Alright, you haven't lied to any of us yet, so I suppose I'll believe you," he said, conceding the point. Harry figured his friend just didn't care to argue the point.

"Who cares about some house elf," said Christine, deciding to butt into the conversation as she tightened her hold on Harry's arm. "Let me tell you about my summer, Harry..."

Harry looked over at Blaise with a slightly pleading expression. His friend just smirked and mouthed 'good luck' before they all set off, causing the raven haired youth to glare before turning his attention back to Christine as she continued to talk. Just because he didn't want to listen to her, didn't mean he had to be rude. He was just thankful that his time spent with Angeline had pretty desensitized him to the older girls act somewhat, otherwise he was sure his face would look like a tomato by now.



The first stop the Zabini's made was to the apothecary where Celestina began to stalk up on several of the rarer ingredients they had. Harry was tempted to go and look at some of the ingredients himself, but Christine was still hanging off of his arm talking about how her friend Stacy was caught sleeping with her boyfriend by her parents.

"Personally, I don't know what she was thinking," she told Harry as she quite literally pulled him around behind her mother. "Her parents are so straight laced, especially her father, what else could she expect. I would have never been caught doing something like that if mum was as...traditional as they were."

Times like these really made Harry wish he didn't have eidetic memory, really, why would he want to remember a conversation like this for all eternity?

When Celestina's business was finished the group of four found their way over to Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour. Not having much of a sweat tooth Harry had never been there in all the times he had gone to Diagon Alley.

"Do you want anything Harry?" asked Celestina as she got herself some triple-chocolate ice cream with hot fudge and caramel. Blaise got a regular vanilla with strawberry toppings and Christine ordered raspberry cheesecake with cookie crumbs.

"Oh, don't worry about me," said Harry as he pulled out his money bag and pulled out the necessary amount for a large ice cream. "I've got more than enough money. I'll have a large banana-and-peanut-butter ice cream please."

The man took one look at him before his eyes widened at seeing the scar. "Right away, Mr. Potter!" he practically shouted. All eyes suddenly turned on Harry who looked at the people warily. There were several boys a little younger than him looking at him in awe, a few older witches and wizards looking shocked, staring at his scar and gaping. But the worst, the worst, were the girls around his age and slightly older who were looking at him like a piece of meat.

"This doesn't look good," was all Blaise could say right before Harry was mobbed.

"I can't believe it's really him!"

"Mr. Potter, I can't tell you how pleased I am to meet you!"

"Can I have your autograph, Mr. Potter. Its for my daughter, you see."

"Oh, Mr. Potter, let me shake your hand!"

All of the people within the ice cream parlor clamored to get near him. It was much the same as his first time in the Leaky Cauldron, with people trying everything in their power to shake his hand, or even just to touch him. The only difference being that Harry was able to keep his magic in check.

For once, Harry was thankful for being with Christine, the girl had kept a tight grip on his arm as she, Blaise and Celestina helped pull him through the crowd, glaring at any girl who came close to him. Unlike the three seconds it took for them to get to the counter, it took nearly five minutes for them just to get to the door. When they got out the Zabini's and Harry made their way to one of the less populated centers and entered a small store to hide from the people that came out of the ice cream parlor to look for him.

"Thanks," said Harry, then, looking down at his shirt he sighed at seeing ice-cream spilled all over it. "So much for my ice-cream."

"I'm sorry about that, Harry," Celestina said, taking out her wand and casting a cleaning spell on his clothes. "I didn't think anyone would have reacted that badly in your presence."

"Well, it wasn't nearly as bad as when I first entered the wizarding world," Harry commented lightly. Despite trying to play it off as a joke, he still shivered a bit as he remembered his first time entering the Leaky Cauldren. "I was nearly suffocated by all the people who had mobbed me then, this was tame in comparison."

"Why don't we just go and get our school supplies," suggested Blaise.

The group headed for Flourish and Blotts. They were by no means the only ones making their way to the bookshop. As they

approached it, they saw to their surprise a large crowd jostling outside the doors, trying to get in. The reason for this was proclaimed by a large banner stretched across the upper windows: GILDEROY LOCKHART will be signing copies of his autobiography MAGICAL ME today 12:30 P.m. to 4:30 P.m.

"Huh, I didn't see that when I came in this morning," said Harry.

"They likely just put it up," Blaise commented. "Or you might have just not noticed it." Harry didn't comment, knowing that even if he hadn't been paying attention to his surroundings he would have still taken in every detail around him.

"You probably just didn't see the signs because of the crowd that was blocking it earlier today," commented Christine. "It's been up since we got here this morning. Do you think we'll actually get to meet Lockheart?" she asked, sounding hopeful. Harry looked over at Blaise who caught his gaze and shrugged.

"Who knows," said Harry.

The crowd seemed to be made up mostly of witches a little older than Celestina, though it was hard to tell with her being so youthful. A harassed-looking wizard stood at the door, saying, "Calmly, please, ladies...Don't push, there ... mind the books, now... "

The four squeezed into the shop with Harry muttering, "I wished I had gotten my supplies earlier this morning." He looked at the long line that wound right to the back of the shop, where Gilderoy Lockhart was signing his books with distaste. He hated waiting in line when shopping.

The two boys grabbed the Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 and then snuck up to the line where Celestina and Christine were waiting. "Got your books?" asked Celestina, both boys nodded and showed them her books. "Good, but it seems we'll have to wait for a moment before we can buy anything. Lockheart will be coming in a moment," she gave a passing glance to her daughter who looked to be as excited as the other witches to see the famous man and sighed.

Gilderoy Lockhart came slowly into view, seated at a table surrounded by large pictures of his own face, all winking and flashing dazzlingly white teeth at the crowd. The real Lockhart was

wearing robes of forget-me-not blue that exactly matched his eyes; his pointed wizard's hat was set at a jaunty angle on his wavy hair. Harry thought the man looked like a poof.

A short, irritable-looking man was dancing around taking photographs with a large black camera that emitted puffs of purple smoke with every blinding flash. "Out of the way," he snarled at Blaise, "this is for the Daily Prophet."

"Ugh, whatever," Blaise muttered, annoyed at this man and the large crowd swooning over such an obvious fool. "I can't believe we have to wait for this fool to finish grandstanding before we can buy our books."

"I know what you mean," Harry said.

Gilderoy Lockhart heard him. He looked up. He saw Blaise and then he saw Harry. He stared. Then he leapt to his feet and positively shouted, "It can't be Harry Potter." The crowd parted, whispering excitedly; Lockhart dived forward, seized Harry's arm, and pulled him to the front.

Or at least, he tried to pull him to the front.

Harry had twisted his wrist out of Lockheart's grip and then spun the man around before pulling the blond's hand behind back in an arm lock. The blond man winced in pain as his shoulder joints ground against each other. "Oops, sorry," Harry said in a way that anyone with half a brain could tell he really wasn't. "It's something of a reflex that happens when people try to randomly grab me," he let go of Lockheart who took a step back, rubbing his sore arm.

"Th-that's, ahem, quite alright," he said, his grin suddenly coming back. "You're quite strong, just what I would have expected from you. Thankfully, I knew that was what you were going to do and made sure my own reflexes didn't hurt you."

Harry raised an eyebrow at the obvious lie, aside from the fact that he was stronger than most people, not a lot of wizards actually exercised, relying on their magic to get them by. And from his observations of Lockheart the man didn't look any stronger than any other wizard. If anything he looked weaker than most.

"So, can I help you?" asked Harry, "or do you make a habit of grabbing random passerby's trying to buy their school books?"

The man's face flushed a bit at the perceived insult, but he perked up less than a second later. "Ah, Harry," the man seemed to have gotten over Harry's previous reaction as he grabbed Harry's hand and began to shake it. "I have been wondering when we would meet, after all, two such famous wizards were bound to cross paths eventually."

Harry resisted another sigh, something he seemed to be doing a lot today, as he shook the man's hand and offered a disarming smile to the camera. When Gilderoy let go of his hand he tried to pull away, but Lockhart threw an arm around his shoulders and clamped him tightly to his side.

Ladies and gentlemen," he said loudly, waving for quiet. "What an extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment for me to make a little announcement I've been sitting on for some time! When young Harry here stepped into Flourish and Blotts today, he only wanted to buy my autobiography – which I shall be happy to present him now, free of charge-" The crowd applauded again.

"He had no idea," Lockhart continued, giving Harry a little shake, it was almost enough to cause Harry to lash out at him with a palm thrust to the nose. "That he would shortly be getting much, much more than my book, *Magical Me*. He and his schoolmates will, in fact, be getting the real magical me. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure and pride in announcing that this September, I will be taking up the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!" The crowd cheered and clapped and Harry found himself being presented with the entire works of Gilderoy Lockhart. Harry sighed as he set the books on his shoulder and walked back towards Blaise and his family, thinking that it was fortunate he at least didn't have to buy all these books.

"Would you mind shrinking these for me Celest?" asked Harry.

"Of course, Harry," she said with a smile as she brought out her wand and waved it at the books, shrinking them so he could put them in one of his endless bags.

"Harry!" Turning around Harry was just in time to catch a strawberry blond missile, he instinctively wrapped his arms around who ever had jumped on him. Though a part of him hadn't had the time to process just who had jumped him.

The person pulled back and Harry saw that it was Hannah Abbott, grinning at him like an idiot.

"Hey Hannah," greeted Harry with a smile. Then he saw Susan walk up to them and smiled at her as well, "Sue, how are you two doing?"

"Hey, Harry!" Hannah said, before spotting Blaise and his family and greeting them as well.

"Hello," Susan mumbled in her usual soft spoken voice.

"I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, seeing you two here," Harry said. "Though I must confess I thought everyone else had already gotten their shopping done."

"We would have gone shopping sooner," started Hannah, grinning even wider. "But our families decided to get together and go on vacation to Florence."

"Italy, huh?" said Harry, thinking of Italy reminded him of Angeline. He shuddered lightly.

"Are you ok, Harry?" asked Susan with some concern in her voice, noticing his shiver.

"Fine," replied Harry. "That sounds fun, I've always wanted to visit Italy."

"It's a very beautiful place," Celestina agreed as she walked up behind them. "Are these some of your friends Blaise?"

"This is Susan Bones, and Hannah Abbot," said Blaise by way of introduction.

"Bones?" Celestine looked at Susan with an appraising gaze, before she noticed the Abbotts and Amelia Bones walking over to them. "Ah, Amelia, its nice to see you again," she greeted with a pleasant smile.

Amelia nodded in greeting, "Celestina, it has been a while." The woman's voice was cordial, but there was a slight tension to it. Harry assumed it was because the Zabini's were considered a dark family, even though they had not sided with Voldemort during the war. "Do you know Kevin and Naomi Abbott..."

While the adults got to talking, Harry and his friends started a conversation of their own. Harry started talking about his summer, telling them about Dobby and how he had caught the house elf stealing his mail. He again left out the fact that danger would be coming to Hogwarts, and it would likely stay that way until he knew just what that danger was, if it existed at all.

"You can't honestly expect us to believe a house elf was stealing your mail," Hannah said after getting over her initial shock at such a bad excuse.

"I'm not lying," Harry said, slightly annoyed that all his friends thought he was being dishonest. While he had no trouble keeping information to himself, and telling half truths, he would never outright lie to someone. "I caught a house elf named Dobby in my room, with all of the letters you guys sent, as well as my Hogwarts supply list. I think he may have been under orders."

"But why would a house elf be ordered to steal your mail?" Hannah asked skeptically.

"Maybe he thought I wouldn't want to return if I believed that my friends didn't want to talk to me," Harry suggested.

Hannah still looked like she didn't believe him, "I don't know..."

"I believe you Harry," Susan said, gaining the attention of said raven haired youth and the other two.

"Thanks, Sue," Harry smiled at the girl, getting a blush to spread across her face, "I'm glad someone believes me."

"Hmph, whatever," Hannah huffed, turning her head away with a haughty expression on her face.

"So have you two gotten all of the necessary books?" asked Blaise, eying all the Lockheart books in his shopping bag with a shudder.

"Of course!" said Hannah, holding up her own bag with a grin. "Can you believe we're actually going to have Lockheart as the Professor for the D.A.D.A.? I mean, he's like an expert on the subject."

"I don't know," said Harry, looking over at the man who was now sitting down and signing autographs warily. "He strikes me as more of a show boater."

"A what?" asked Blaise.

"Sorry, muggle term," Harry apologized, he was going to have to see if there were any books on wizarding slang because he always felt kind of stupid when he spoke in muggle terms and his pureblood friends didn't know what he was talking about. "A show boater is a performer who usually performs acts on a boat, the word was later changed to a muggle slang term that meant someone who acts and lies in order to gain fame."

"Are you saying you think Lockheart's a liar?" asked Hannah in a dangerously low tone, it was obvious she admired the man a great deal.

Harry shrugged. "I can't say for sure, but it looks to me like he enjoys his fame far too much."

"You're just jealous," Hannah said.

Harry gave her a deadpan look, "hello, Boy-Who-Lived here. Why would I be jealous of a man who looks like a poof?"

Blaise snickered at what he felt was an accurate description of the man, while Hannah looked angry and Susan looked scandalized. Hannah was about to open her mouth to berate Harry for insulting her idol and likely, secret-crush, when Celestina, the Abbotts and Amelia finished their conversation.

"Harry, Blaise," the Italian beauty spoke up to get their attention, "we're heading out now to finish shopping. Would you like to come with me, or stay with your friends?"



The two of them looked at each other, though Harry's eyes strayed to Christine, who was thankfully paying more attention to Lockheart at the moment. He looked over at his dark skinned friend and they both nodded. Blaise turned to his mom and said, "I think we'll spend some time with Hannah and Susan."

Celestina nodded as if she expected this, "that's fine, just make sure you meet me at the Leaky Cauldron in two hours, ok?"

"Of course, mum."

While Celestina grabbed and dragged her daughter out of the store, Blaise and Harry continued on their way with Hannah, Susan and their parents. "It's good to see you again, Mr. Potter," said Mrs. Abbott, holding out her hand.

Harry returned her greeting and kissed the back before shaking Mr. Abbott's hand with a firm handshake. "I'm glad you're here, my daughter has been complaining about how you wouldn't return any of her letters," he told the boy.

"Dad!" Hannah shouted in a mortified voice, one that Mr. Abbott chose to ignore.

"What? It's true," he defended, right before Hannah began going off on a rant about him embarrassing her in front of her friends. Harry shook his head before turning to Amelia Bones, who shook his hand and gave him a stern gaze.

"Susan has told me something rather interesting about your first year at Hogwarts," she said and Harry understood what she was talking about.

"I have," he replied, he looked over at Susan who turned slightly red and looked down at the ground. Sighing, he looked back at Amelia and asked, "have you told anyone about my adventures?"

"No," Amelia said, shaking her head. "Since I have no proof and memories are not admissible evidence, telling the Ministry would do nothing more than cause unneeded upheaval or panic. Though, for my own benefit, I would like to see the memory some time, if you'll allow it."

"Of course," said Harry, "maybe during this Christmas Break or even some time before school starts again we'll schedule a time where I can give them to you."

"That will be fine," she said, "I'll need to procure a penseive but that won't be too hard. I'll contact you through Susan and we can make a schedule."

Harry nodded, "that's fine."

For the rest of their time together, Harry, Blaise, Hannah and Susan spent their time going through various stores for school supplies and a few other items. Hannah had dragged them to Gambel and Japes, a wizarding joke shop. Harry had wondered why she took them there since Hannah never struck him as a prankster. He soon found out when she grabbed several Dr. Filibuster's Fabulous Wet-Start, No-Heat fireworks. "I've always loved watching fireworks go off," Hannah admitted as she paid for several dozen fireworks that had visual effects.

The stores that Harry had enjoyed the most were a small shop called Armor Emporium that sold some of the equipment that was used by aurors. He had managed to buy a few items like the wizarding version of a flash bang and a pair of glasses that were charmed to act like a magnifying lens. He felt they would be useful in the future.

Another place he had gone to was Quality Quidditch Supplies; there Harry had bought an advanced broom cleaning kit that contained a cleaning potion that acted like a scourgify charm only it worked better by not only cleaning, but also covering the surface of a broom with a protective shiny coat that almost looked like varnish. Susan and Hannah had not been as interested in the store, however, and as soon as Harry bought what he wanted, proceeded to drag him and Blaise out.

"I don't want to spend all my time watching you and Blaise drool over brooms," Hannah told him as she pulled him out of the shop by the arm.

Harry also got a taste of what it was like to shop for clothing with a pair of witches, it honestly wasn't all that different from shopping with Lisa except that the clothes they had to choose from were much

different. Most of the witches clothing consisted of robes that were cut differently than male robes, being more designed to show off the females figure.

To be honest, there wasn't much in the way of variety that he was used to seeing in the muggle world. But Hannah seemed to enjoy it, he couldn't tell with Susan since she was more or less being dragged along by Hannah, her face as red as her hair.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Hannah as she and a blushing Susan stepped out of the changing rooms.

"you two look...nice," said Harry, they did look cute but aside from the fact that these robes were cut in such a way that they looked more like a dress he couldn't see anything really different from normal robes.

Hannah put her hands on her hips and pouted, "just nice? That's all you can come up with?"

Harry shrugged while Blaise spoke up, "I don't really see the difference between these and your normal everyday robes." Harry had to wonder if his mom had ever taught him about fashion or if he just didn't know or care about it enough to pay attention.

By the end of the day Harry and Blaise had been somehow coerced into carrying Susan and Hannah's clothing that they had bought, while the adults watched on in amusement. The day ended when Susan and Hannah left, with Hannah giving Harry a big hug and Harry hugging a blushing Susan.

Blaise left a few minutes after when he and Harry met his mom and sister at the Leaky Cauldron.

"I can't believe those hussies," Christine had mumbled as soon as the two of them were in sight. "Trying to hog all of Harry's time."

Celestina looked at her daughter in mild amusement before turning a smile on the two boys, "are you ready to go home Blaise?"

"Yes, mum."

"Harry? Do you need an escort or..."

Harry gave her a small half grin, "don't worry about me, I've been traveling the down town parts of muggle London since I was nine." Besides that, he still had one more place he wanted to check out before he left.

"Then we'll take our leave," she smiled at him, "it was nice seeing you again, Harry. Next year, you must spend more time with us."

"Of course," Harry said, bowing a little. He looked back up and tilted his head curious, "by the way...I was wondering if you knew of a way to send and receive letters from the muggle world?"

"Uh, yes, I do," Celestine said, slightly startled at the quick shift in topic. She shook her head and smiled, saying, "there is actually a Owl post office within the Ministry that you can send your letters to, they're all then summoned to the muggle post office. If you want the letters to get returned, just make sure they use a Royal Mail post office, those are the ones that are charmed to take letters to the Ministry. Oh, and all letters are to be given the address of 2112, East, Ministry Lane," as an after thought she added, "do you want me to write that down?"

"No, I've got it, thank you," said Harry.

"You're welcome, we will see you some other time, Harry."

"Be sure to send me a letter or two when you get back to school Harry," Christine breathed as she leaned down and planted a lingering kiss on his cheek. Harry turned a bright shade of red and shivered slightly. He knew there was a reason this girl scared him.

The three left and Harry shook his head, heading back out to Diagon Alley. Harry entered the small antique shop where he had found Rowena's diary and saw the same old man manning the shop. Said man looked up and noticed immediately noticed, "ah, Harry. I was wondering when you would come back to my shop."

"Yeah?" Harry questioned with a raised eyebrow as he walked further in. "I suppose you're not as surprised to see me then?"

"Of course not," the old man said with a chuckle, "I can tell your one of the types of like rare memorabilia instead half the garbage most shops try to sell you."

"You right about that," said Harry, "and I am here for something pretty rare."

"And that would be?"

"I'm looking for any books you may have on alchemy," said Harry, leaning onto the counter.

"Alchemy, huh?" the man mumbled, "that's a pretty difficult field."

"So I've heard, but I was hoping to find something about it here," Harry gave the man a pointed look. "There's nothing about it in Flourish and Blotts, but they usually only do large stock items."

"True, I may have something, hold on one moment," the man moved back into the shop and Harry wondered why he wasn't having Harry follow him like last time. Shrugging the thought off he decided to look around at some of the items. He came back while Harry was poking at one of the objects that seemed to be shooting smoke, or steam from a tube on top.

"I wouldn't touch that," the man warned, bringing Harry's attention away from the object.

"Why not?" asked Harry.

"That particular item has a habit of exploding and the steam inside often causes a massive rash."

Harry gulped and backed away from the object, "I – I see..." he shook his head and put his game face back on as he strode over the old man. "What have you got for me?" he asked.

"I think you'll enjoy this book," the man held the book out for Harry. It was titled Alchemy, The Eternal Art.

"There's no author," commented Harry as he looked at the back and front cover.

"No there isn't," the man said, "no one knows who wrote that book but when I got it I heard rumor that it was created by the person who first discovered alchemy. Of course, that is just a rumor."

"I see," Harry opened the first page and saw that it held a very complicated Transmutation circle, it had two human figures on it, one male and one female, both had their arms open wide at a forty-five degree tilt and their left and right arm were crisscrossing the others respectively. Flipping a few more pages revealed several circles that he could not recognize, along with notes surrounding the outer-most circle. "I'll take it."

"Very well, this one won't be as complicated as Rowena's, mainly because I have no clue about the validity of the rumor about it's author," the man paused and looked to be in thought. "That being said it will still be at a price two thousand galleons."

"That fine," Harry reached into his bag and pulled out his money bag and paid for the book.

"Enjoy the read young man," said the old man.

"I intend to," Harry replied, pocketing his bag and the book before walking out of the store. He wove his way through Diagon Alley, entering the Leaky Cauldron and quickly making his way out. Walking out and making his way towards a deserted Alley Harry dissapparated with a soft crack.

Reappearing in his room he took a look at the clock to see that it was nearing three in the afternoon, he took out his book and money bag, pulled off his wizarding clothes and changed into a pair of muggle clothing. He looked at the book for few moments, he was tempted to read it but his sense of self-preservation kicked in as he decided it would be better to spend what remaining time he had left today with Lisa. Because honestly, when that girl got angry she scared him more than Voldemort ever could.

XoX

I do know that Nicholas Wives name is Perennelle... now. To be honest, I simply felt to lazy to change it in all my chapters once I learned that.

Anyways, next chapter is up. Enjoy.

Pokemaster12 going to bed.

## Chapter 6: A Visit to the Bones'

XoX

It was early in the morning that Harry had gotten out of the shower and got dressed in a pair of faded blue jeans and a dark blue shirt. Going over to his trunk he opened it up to the compartment where he kept all of his Wizarding clothes and pulled out one of his robes, this one was a forest green and while it was not as elaborate as his dress robes, it was still nicer than the ones he had gotten specifically for Hogwarts.

Taking out his mother's wand, Harry cast a quick shrinking charm on it and put the robes in his pocket for later use. With Dobby no longer stealing his letters Harry had been corresponding with his friends in the Wizarding World a lot more often. It was this continual ability to keep in contact with his friends that led to his current predicament.

Harry had been invited by several of his friends to visit their family and/or relatives. This was not all that unexpected if Harry were honest with himself. Aside from the fact that any good parent would want to meet the new friend their child had made, there was also the added fact of who he was. Being friends with The-Boy-Who-Lived was a big deal in the wizarding world. It was somewhat annoying that people would make such a fuss simply because of something that happened when he was one, and that's not even counting the fact that the entire reason people adored him was because he managed to survive the night his parents were killed by an egotistical maniac.

However, while Harry was bothered – and if he were honest with himself – angry by the fact that people only look at that night as the moment Voldemort's reign ended, he knew that there was nothing he could do about it. As he had told his friends before they left for the summer holidays, people rarely look at something unless it directly affects them, and in the case of Harry surviving the killing curse and defeating Voldemort, people only looked at the surface. All they saw was Voldemort's defeat and Harry's miraculous survival. They didn't see the two lives that had been lost that night, nor what it meant for Harry to have lost both his parents in the span of a few minutes.



All Harry could do was live up to his name and the moniker that Wizarding Britain had thrust upon him. And he would, of that Harry had no doubt. While he disliked his title and the fame that came with it – not for any reasons of not wanting to be famous, but because he felt that fame was not earned – there were certain benefits to it. His name carried weight, it didn't matter that he was only twelve years old or that he was in his second year at Hogwarts. The name Harry Potter carried weight, it held power and could be used in his quest to influence and change the wizarding world. All it would require was a little patience, some cunning and gaining the respect of certain people through his intelligence and charm.

After hiding his wands within their disillusioned holsters, Harry made his way outside of the room. Like usual he was at Lisa's house, having been spending more time there than at his own home he had more or less moved into the guest room that Mrs. Crawft had given him. He made his way into the kitchen and was not surprised when he saw Lisa's mom already cooking breakfast.

"Good morning, Mrs. Crawft," Harry said as he walked over to her.

"Oh, good morning, Harry," Mrs. Crawft said with a kind smile. "How was your exercise?"

"Beneficial," Harry said, his words causing Mrs. Crawft to giggle. Ever since he was in elementary school Harry had taken to expanding his vocabulary by constantly using more complex words. He supposed it was a small way to spite the Dursley's, who had often claimed he was a useless idiot that would never amount to anything. When he had first met Lisa's parents he had used the word 'erroneous' during a debate he had gotten into with Mr. Crawft. Ever since then Lisa's parents, her mom in particular found it amusing when he used more complex words to say something, when most people would use something simpler.

Harry ignored the amused noise, however, as he asked, "would you like any help making breakfast?"

"Harry dear," Mrs. Crawft said with that smile that told her she was amused. "What have we talked about when it comes to you helping me around the house?"

"That I am a guest and therefore not responsible for helping around the house," Harry recited. This was one of the other many areas that Mrs. Crawft and he disagreed on. While Harry was greatly adverse to picking up after the Dursley's, mainly because they were ungrateful fools. He felt that as a guest it should be his responsibility to help out around the house at least somewhat. After all, they were kind enough to let him stay here, the least he could do was repay that kindness. Never let it be said that Harry Potter never paid his debts.

"However, since I am more or less living with you, I would think it would only be proper to help you out," continued Harry.

"You are still a guest," Mrs. Crawft said, shaking her head at the boy. "You may be spending more time here than you are with your relatives, but that does not change the fact that you are a guest in this house." Harry smiled at the slight derision she used when referring to the Dursley's. Mrs. Crawft seemed to notice this because she gave him a small grin, before saying, "now, why don't you sit down while I finish preparing breakfast."

"Fine," Harry agreed reluctantly, his honor warring with her orders. However, despite his belief that he should help in order to repay Mrs. Crawft for her kindness, he knew her orders superseded his desire. He was not the ruler of the house, so he had to abide by Mrs. Crawft's rules.

He sat down at the table, thinking about the coming day. Today he had agreed to meet Susan's Aunt, Amelia Bones at her house for dinner. The main reason Harry knew was that Ms. Bones wanted to discuss Harry's run in with Voldemort during the Sorcerer's Stone incident. The conversation would likely take a while, so Harry would be going to their house a few hours before supper, which would hopefully give him time to spend with Susan before he needed to speak with Ms. Bones.

A heavy grunt at the other end of the table caused his attention to shift from his inner thoughts. Looking up he saw Lisa, not yet fully awake, with her hair out of place and slight bags under her eyes sitting down. Lisa had never been a morning person.

"Good morning, Lisa," Harry greeted. Lisa just looked at him for a second, before she huffed and turned her head away from him. He

sighed. "You're not still mad that I agreed to see some of my friends, are you?" he asked. He had informed Lisa and her family that he had been invited by several of his friends parents to dinner in order to meet with them. While her mom and dad had been understanding, and knew that he was really only telling them out of courtesy because they were Lisa's parents, Lisa had been anything but.

He could still remember how Lisa had yelled at him for wanting to spend more time with his new friends – she had put a large emphasis on new friends – rather than her. He had told her she was being ridiculous of course, he had spent most of his summer with her, sans his alchemy training. Even then Harry had spent every other day with her during his training with the sole exception being the two weeks he had spent taking care of Angeline.

Not that his logical and well thought out argument had any bearing on his emotional friend. Even after making his case in his defense Lisa had still remained angry. If anything she had gotten even more upset, whether because she knew he was right and didn't want to admit it, or some other reason he had been unable to determine. After yelling at him some more she had run into her room and not come out for the rest of the day.

Honestly, despite having known her for years sometimes he just couldn't understand the girl. He wondered if it was due to a lack in understanding of the female gender as a whole, or if it was just Lisa. He had yet to have any of these problems with the other female's he had befriended at Hogwarts, but at the same time had to concede that he had not known them as long and therefore it was plenty possible that any problems of this nature had just yet to arise. And he couldn't compare Lisa to her mom because Mrs. Crawft was an adult, and therefore much more mature and experienced in the ways of the world than Lisa.

Realizing he was beginning to over think things, as was his tendency when there was a problem he couldn't solve, Harry came back to the present and vowed to be more observant of his other female friends when he met up with them. Maybe a study on the various girls in his life could help him.

"Come on, Lisa," Harry said in a slightly pleading voice. "Don't be like this. You know I have to meet with the families of my other friends, I can't very well ignore an invitation from them." He debated

explaining propriety and how important it was to one's social standing and how they were perceived by others, but decided against it. No doubt if he went into social mores and proper etiquette she would either get angry, or not understand a single thing he was talking about. He also realized that there was a distinct difference between social propriety in the wizarding world and the muggle one. No doubt trying to explain why certain things were important, when they hadn't mattered in the muggle world for the last fifteen-hundred years or so would only confuse the issue.

Lisa seemed to stay angry for a second longer before Harry saw, much to his chagrin, tears forming at the corner of her eyes. "I-I know," she sniffed. "It's just that, I always got to see you before, and now you're gone for nine months and I only get to see you in the summer, and now you've got other friends and I... I..."

Seeing his friend actually begin to cry made Harry wonder if girls got more emotional when they went through puberty. He understood the basics of what happened to a girl over a boy, with males gaining more muscle mass, becoming more aggressive and changing their views on girls, and girls growing more womanly and becoming more interested in boys. However, he had only gotten through the technical aspects of puberty in their entirety, while admitting – if only to himself – that he had been too embarrassed to read the rest of what happened when a female went through puberty due to the book beginning to talk about emotional growth and its importance in a sexual relationship. Granted he had been nine at the time he read the book, and despite his intelligence had not been mature enough to truly look at the rest from an objective point of view.

Maybe it would be beneficial for him to read that book now. That way he could avoid the issues he seemed to be having with his friend in the future.

Still, just because he didn't understand why his friend was getting so emotional, didn't mean he had no knowledge on how to handle the moments when his friend was depressed about something.

Sighing, he stood up from his seat and the table and walked over to Lisa. She seemed to know exactly what he was coming over for, because the moment he came to her side she lunged at him. Having more or less expected a similar reaction Harry was prepared for when the girl made an attempt at bowling him over. He managed to

remain standing by taking a step back to steadying himself as the girl clung to him like rubber cement.

He resisted the urge to sigh, as well as squash the fact that he was secretly pleased Lisa cared about him this much. Absently, Harry wondered if Lisa's ability to produce tears was some kind of magical property. He had never known another female to cry more than she did, and her ability to produce what seemed to be a never ending stream of tears. Harry had no doubt that if his friends tears could be captured, there would be enough water to form a river on par with the Nile river in Egypt during the flooding seasons.

Noticing that his best friend was quieting down, he stopped his hand from instinctively running through her hair and asked, "are you feeling alright now?"

"No," Lisa sniffed, her voice sounding nasally due to her crying. "But I think I'm done getting your clothes wet." A mildly embarrassed blush crossed her face as she looked at his near soaked through t-shirt. "Sorry about that, by the way."

"Don't worry about it," Harry waved away her apology, wondering what the best way to lighten the mood was. A sly smile crossed his face a second later as he said, "with the number of times I've had you cry on me, I've grown used to it."

Lisa's eyes flashed and her face flushed red as she shouted, "hey! Are you calling me a cry baby!"

"You said it, not me," Harry said.

"That... but... you..."

"Wow, I've finally managed to render you speechless. I didn't think that was possible."

"HARRY!"

XoX

After spending half of the day with Lisa, who felt better at being the center of his attention for several hours, along with dragging him on

another shopping excursion (thankfully she didn't want to buy anything this time), Harry made his way to the Leaky Cauldron.

The famous entrance between the muggle world and Diagon Alley was the same as always, and Harry walked through the pub without a second glance. He was already dressed in his wizarding robes and had used a mild glamour charm to disguise himself. It was amazing how no one recognized him without his scar, as far as most people were concerned he was just another boy who looked amazingly similar to Harry Potter.

Walking over to the fireplace, Harry grabbed a hand full of floo powder and called out, "Bones Manor!" And once again came the sweeping sensation of being sucked through a drain. Thankfully he had already dealt with the feeling before, and so he was prepared for it this time. Despite his preparation, the end result was still the same. Coming upon the fireplace that no doubt belonged to the Bones', Harry was launched out of the floo like a catapult and sent sailing through the air. Like last time he was saved by his feline-like grace, flipping himself in mid-air and landing on his feet. With a sigh, he began dusting himself off before a voice interrupted him.

"You sure know how to make an entrance."

Looking up Harry saw Susan looking at him with a measure of mirth, her mouth hidden behind her hand as she tried to contain a giggle. Her aunt Amelia, who was the one that had spoken, was giving him a once over, her eyes dancing with amusement.

Harry sighed and said, "this is only the second time I've traveled by floo, but I get the feeling me and it will never get a long." He walked over to them and held out his hand for Amelia.

"You must be exceedingly powerful for the floo network to shoot you out like that," Amelia said, taking the hand and giving him a firm hand shake.

Harry raised an eyebrow at her comment and asked, "how so?"

"The floo network uses a wizards own power to propel them forward," Amelia explained. "So the more power you have..."

"The faster you travel," Harry finished.

"Correct."

"I see." Harry looked back at the fireplace as his mind began to whirl. The idea of floo travel using his own power to help him reach his destination was intriguing, and it explained why he had so much trouble traveling by it. While it was not something he thought about, Harry knew he was magically powerful, more so than the average student at Hogwarts. While he was not good at sensing the magic of an individual, a skill that was made even more difficult at magically powerful places like Hogwarts, he knew from the ease at which he accomplished his spells and the fact that he could cast more spells longer than others that he had more magic at his disposal than anyone else his age.

And with that increase in magical reserves, came a lack of control over his power. From what Harry had read on the theories of magical development, magical children had cases of accidental magic all the way up until their first year at Hogwarts. After which, they learned to control their magic by using it to perform spells. In fact, Harry had a theory that the first year at Hogwarts was more about learning to control one's magic, then it was actually learning any of the spells they taught that year. It would explain why the spells they performed were all very basic, and focused more on learning the wand movements, how to visualize and properly pronouncing incantations. All of these aspects helped one focus and control their magic.

Which meant the reason Harry had trouble using the floo was not because he was magically powerful, or to be more accurate, it was not just because he was magically powerful. He simply had too much power for a child his age to handle.

Thinking along those lines a lot of incidents made sense to him. Despite having used magic for years, he had always had issues with accidental magic. Particularly when feeling strong emotions, which Harry always felt was one of the keys to using magic. Through out the years, his magic had always gone out of control on certain instances.

He remembered one time where he had gotten angry during his first few months with Master Wei. During that time the old Chinese Master had refused to teach him any fighting techniques, instead

having him going through breathing exercises, meditation and stretching. That was more or less the standard practice with Master Wei with any new students, it was designed to make them more limber and strengthen their mind and body in preparation for what he had to teach. Harry hadn't cared about that, all he saw was this man who was not teaching him what he wanted. He had gotten angry after being refused for the one-hundred and thirteenth time, and in his anger ended up blowing out several of the light bulbs in the ceiling.

There were other incidents too. A few times he had accidentally destroyed a vase of Petunia's, the time he had blown up one of the tires on Vernon's car, transfiguring items Dudley threw at him into something harmless, and the time he had accidentally erased Mrs. Crawft's memory when she had caught him using her bathroom because Lisa had been hogging the one his friends room shared with the guest room. There were innumerable times when accidental magic had been involved in his life, despite the fact that he had been consciously using magic for years.

With these thoughts in mind Harry came to the conclusion that he had a problem. He lacked true control over his magic. He could use it, and use it well. The fact that he always got a spell right and never failed when casting told him he could use his magic just as good, if not better, than anyone else his age. However, if his theory on accidental magic was correct, and if his being launched out of the floo like canon ball was any indication, then it meant he was likely wasting magic when casting a spell.

This was something he would need to fix. If there was one thing Harry disliked it was being wasteful, and wasting ones magic was just as bad – in his mind – as wasting water when in the shower.

First he would need to find some way of determining how much magic he was using during his spell casting. This wasn't a problem, he could easily sense the amount of magic he used with each spell. The real challenge would lie in figuring out how much magic he was wasting when he cast a spell. Perhaps if he could somehow find a way to figure out how much magic other people used and compare it to the amount he was putting into his spell. Or maybe he could figure out a spell that sensed the amount of ambient magic that was being wasted when he cast a spell. Either way it would be hard, but



he was sure there was something in the library at Hogwarts he could find on this, or maybe in the restricted section.

His mind was drawn back into reality when he heard a voice saying, "Mr. Potter... Mr. Potter... Harry."

"Yes? What?" Harry said, blinking several times as he came to. He found himself staring at a concerned Ms. Bones and Susan.

"Are you alright, Mr. Potter?" Ms. Bones asked. "You spaced out for nearly five minutes."

Harry blushed, feeling embarrassed at being caught going off into his own thoughts. That had always been his biggest problem when finding out something that intrigued him, or caught his attention. "I'm fine... I was just thinking about what you said, and what it would mean for me."

"What I said?" Ms. Bones looked at him curiously for a moment. "What do you mean?"

"When you mentioned the floo, and how it keeps shooting me out," Harry explained.

"You mean when I said you must be magically powerful?" Ms. Bones asked, likely for clarification Harry figured.

"Yes," Harry said, nodding his head. "I realized that it meant I need to learn to better control my magic." At the woman's quizzical gaze Harry decided to further explain his theory. "You see, you said that I must be powerful in order to have the floo eject me as it does, due to how the floo relies on a witch or wizards magic to propel them forward. Which means my reserves are larger than average. However, I doubt a wizard like Dumbledore has such a problem, and I'm fairly sure he has four to five times more magic than I do."

"That is most likely true," Ms. Bones conceded, looking at the boy curiously. She seemed genuinely interested in what Harry had to say.

"Which means of course, that my problem isn't that I have more magic than most, or that I'm more powerful than others," Harry said with a little excitement. It was honestly refreshing to be able to

speaking with someone about one of his theories on magic, he could never do that with Lisa, and even his friends at Hogwarts often had no clue what he was talking about when he began speaking magical jargon, not even Hermione. "It means that I don't have as much control over my magic as other people do. Or to be more concise, I have too much magic for someone of my age to control."

Amelia stared at him for several seconds before smiling. She turned to Susan and said, "your right, he does sound more like a Ravenclaw than a Gryffindor."

"Told you," Susan said, before blushing when Harry turned his gaze on her.

"What's this about a Ravenclaw?" he asked.

"My niece told me you were very intelligent. She mentioned that you were very smart and seemed to know everything the teachers at Hogwarts taught you, before they even taught it." Ms. Bones said as she eyed Harry appraisingly. "I don't think she realized just how brilliant your mind really is." Harry blushed a bit, causing the woman to laugh. "I see you have a bit of trouble taking praise. Come, why don't we go somewhere more comfortable?"

Harry quickly shook off his blush before following the woman. As he did he said, "it's not so much as taking praise as it is receiving too much praise. I have no problems with my teachers telling me how good a job I've done, I just have... issues, when people lay the compliments a little more deeply."

"I suppose that is understandable," the woman said as they made their way into foyer, a large room with a stairwell and several doors that connected to other parts of the room. Harry noticed several magical portraits of various people, likely members of the Bones family conversing with each other or watching him and the two residence of the house as they walked. He shook his head and focused more on Ms. Bones as she continued speaking. "That is good, as it shows that while you are not above taking praise, you are also modest."

"I suppose, I never really thought of it that way," Harry commented. Truthfully he had, while it may be a natural reaction, he still recognized it for what it was and knew it would help him carve his

place in Wizarding Society. The ability to accept praise without looking arrogant was a very valuable skill after all.

Taking one of the many doors, Ms. Bones led them through a corridor with richly lit candles that cast a warm glow in the interior. The center of the floor was carpeted with yellow and black, showing off that the Bones family had a history of being in Hufflepuff. It was much like how the darker families like the Zabini's decorated their house in greens and silvers to show their allegiance to Slytherin.

He turned to look at Susan, who he noticed had gone quiet and smiled, asking, "how have you been Susan?"

"Good..." Susan said with a blush. When he gave her a look her face turned a little more red and she continued, saying, "not much has happened since we met in Diagon Alley. I did get started reading some of the course material, however."

Harry repressed a grin. Susan was very much prone towards giving one word answers when she spoke, Harry figured it was due to how soft spoken and shy she was. Having figured that out, he had always asked her to be more specific when talking about anything. It would take a while for her to truly give more than single word answers, while she didn't have Neville's level of shyness, Susan had more trouble speaking about things than the accident prone boy did. But that was fine, Harry had time to help her get rid of the habit and begin talking more.

He continued to engage in conversation with Susan as they entered what Harry assumed to be the Drawing Room. It was a very comfortable and inviting room. The walls were painted in a more earthen tone than the rest of the rooms he had been in thus far. The floor was made from a reddish-brown, varnished wood. There were several comfortable looking couches and chairs surrounding a coffee table with a rug underneath that, which had what Harry believed to be the Bones Coat of Arms on it.

Ms. Bones led the pair of children to the seats, taking one of the chairs while Harry sat down on a couch, Susan choosing a spot right next to him. This had Ms. Bones smiling, though the exact reason was lost on Harry.

What followed was the standard engagement of pleasantries that were involved in pureblood society. While he had guessed correctly that Amelia Bones was not a woman who cared for the many policies put in place by the more bigoted members of wizarding society, even she enjoyed some of the finer traditions that came with her status.

Most of the conversation centered around Harry, with Ms. Bones asking many questions. "So what did you think of your first year at Hogwarts?" she asked eventually, and Harry had a feeling that they were coming to a head with what she wanted to really get down to discussing.

"It was good, for the most part," Harry said. "It was nice to finally be able to make friends without having to worry about revealing that I'm magical."

"What do you mean?" asked Ms. Bones, frowning a bit at his comment.

"What I mean is that I've always had bad cases of what you would call accidental magic," Harry said carefully, not wanting to reveal that he had been using magic for years, but leaving enough information to let Amelia know that he was capable of coming to logical conclusions. "Things always seemed to happen around me that never happened to anyone else. Object breaking when I got angry, lights flickering, there were several cases where my cousin would throw something at me and I would transfigure it into something harmless, and there was one time I had accidentally apparated onto the roof of my school. Then there was the time I..." he trailed off as he noticed the woman looking at him a little wide eyed. "Um... is there a problem, Madam Bones?"

Ms. Bones seemed to shake herself from her stupor as she said, "no, there's nothing wrong. It's just having so many cases of accidental magic is very rare. There hasn't been a case like that in well over a hundred years, at least going by Ministry records."

Harry nodded his head in acknowledgment of her words, mentally going over them and what they likely alluded to. After a moment he continued answering her previous question. "As I said, it was nice to finally... belong is a good word I guess. Aside from my friend Lisa and her family, I've never felt truly comfortable around nonmagicals,

because I knew I was different. Strange things happened around me, I could do things they couldn't and I'd always felt out of place among them because of that."

"I had thought you were rather muggle friendly," Ms. Bones said carefully.

"Oh, I am," Harry said. "Nonmagicals are wonderfully innovated and creative, always coming up with new ways of doing things, creating new and innovative technologies. I hold a high amount of respect for nonmagical culture, and will admit to enjoying many of the activities the muggle world has to offer. I only mean that because of all my cases of accidental magic, and knowing that I was the cause as it never seemed to happen to anyone else I knew, I felt uncomfortable around them."

"Ah," Ms. Bones said lightly. "That makes sense, while it is not as evident in others as it is you, many muggle borns have that same sense of not belonging when in the muggle world." She paused for a moment, before making a gesture with her hand. "Please continue."

Harry was all too happy to do so. "The start of the year was fun, learning how things worked, finding my way around the castle and meeting new people. Classes were a bit, boring, I think."

"Boring?" asked Ms. Bones, raising a single eyebrow.

"They were too easy," Harry said with a shrug, not seeing a point in lying about that. "The entire first year focused on mainly incantation and wand movements. It may be because of my martial arts training, but I am very adept at visualization. I learned early on that wand movements and incantations can for the most part be discarded so long as you are able to visualize what you want your spell to do."

"So you can not only cast silently, but don't need the wand movements either?" asked Ms. Bones in a voice that said she was impressed.

"Yes ma'am."

"Susan was right about you, Mr. Potter. You are quite talented if your capable of doing that at this age," she said. Ms. Bones looked at him for a moment, and Harry knew she was going to ask him

about the real reason she had wanted to speak with him. "What about the second half of your school, when you found out about the Sorcerer's Stone."

"I'll honestly admit that when I found out the Stone was at Hogwarts, I wanted nothing to do with it," Harry said, surprising Ms. Bones. "I had first found out after hearing about the Cerberus that was guarding a trap door on the third floor corridor, which Dumbledore had told us was off limits to all who 'did not wish to die a most painful death'." Harry put up quotation marks while Ms. Bones raised an eyebrow. "After hearing about the Cerberus I decided to see for myself, and once I had confirmed it I went to see the gamekeeper, Hagrid."

"Ah, I know of him," Ms. Bones said. "He was the gamekeeper when I went to school as well, after he got expelled for some reason. I do recall him having a fondness for dangerous animals."

"Apparently he had managed to smuggle in a dragons egg and hatched it last year," Harry said, further proving the woman's point. "When I went to Hagrid and asked him about the dog, he told me that I should forget about what it's guarding, and that it was business between Dumbledore and Nicolas Flamel. Naturally, once I'd heard the name I remembered seeing it on a chocolate frog card and how he was a famed alchemist. After that it was easy to find out why he was so famous."

"And what caused you to go after the stone?" asked Ms. Bones.

"Hermione," Harry said. "She's one of my friends in Gryffindor. She also found out that the Stone was at Hogwarts and was convinced that Snape was after it." His reasons of course was something of a half-truth. It wasn't an outright lie, but it wasn't the total truth either. He had already known that Hermione would go after the Stone, he had counted on it. Had she not been so adamant on going after the famed artifact, then Dumbledore would have realized the Stone was stolen when he went to check up on it. Not that he was going to let Ms. Bones know that.

"And was Snape the one after the stone?"

"No, it was Voldemort," said Harry. He stopped talking, looking for any sign of fear or stress when he said the Dark Lord's name on the

older woman's face. Not seeing anything more then alarm and concern, he smiled and continued. "You see, he had somehow managed to possess Professor Quirrel, our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. He was riding on the back of the man's head."

"I see..." the woman looked at him pensively for a second. "Mr. Potter, would it be possible for you to give me the memory of your encounter with Voldemort?"

Harry felt his respect for the woman move up a notch. Very few witches and wizards were capable of saying the Dark Lord's name, their fear of him was just that powerful. Hearing someone who lived through the war say Voldemort so casually was a refreshing change for Harry. However, he was curious at her other words. "What do you mean, give you the memory?" he asked curiously.

"I have a device, which is known as a Pensieve," Ms. Bones said. "It allows for the storage and viewing of memories. Basically, I want you to retrieve from your mind and give it to me."

The thought of a device that stored memories was actually very intriguing to Harry. He wondered how such a device would work. However, he quickly snapped out of that line of thinking, before he could become distracted by any theories on the magics used in such a device. Looking back at Ms. Bones he asked, "how would that work?"

Understanding what he was asking, Ms. Bones said, "what you must do is place your want to your temple, then think about the memory and pull it out."

"And does it take the memory? Or a copy of the memory?" Having had the ability to perfectly remember every single waking moment of his life, the idea of simply losing his memories disturbed Harry greatly. Even the more frightening memories his mind held. It was your past that made you who you are after all, and he didn't want to lose such an intimate piece of himself.

"They take the memory. However, I can make a copy and give your memory back," Ms. Bones said at seeing the disturbed look that must have crossed Harry's face.

It took several moments for Harry to decide. When he did, it was not with words. Slowly, he pulled out his wand and held it to his temple. Bringing up the memory was not hard, in fact, he didn't even have to do anything. The memory was already there, waiting for him at the surface of his thoughts along with all of his other memories. Plucking the one he wanted from his mind, Harry pulled his wand back.

A silvery string was attached to the wand, feathery and light, it looked much like a harp string. He looked at it for a moment before holding the wand out towards Ms. Bones, who placed the memory in jar. "I will want that back before I leave," said Harry.

"You know most people would be relieved not to have such a frightening memory," said Ms. Bones.

"I'm not most people," Harry fired back. "I dislike the idea that I can just forget my past. My past made me who I am, and to not be able to remember what made me the person I am today is the most disturbing thing I have ever heard."

Ms. Bones raised an eyebrow at the remark. She slowly nodded and said, "if that is the case, why don't I go review it right now and simply return it to you? The process for copying a memory takes several days, and I'll have to take it to the Ministry." Harry quickly nodded his assent to that idea, especially after hearing it would take several days to copy his memory. Decision made, Ms. Bones stood, with the two twelve year old's following suit. "Well, I'll go review this memory. Susan, why don't you show Harry around?"

"Okay, Auntie," Susan said. She looked at Harry and blushed lightly. "Follow me." Harry got up and followed Susan as she began showing him around the house.

Much like Harry's first estimation of the Bones family when he had entered the foyer, the rest of the house showed him what kind of people they were. The house was significantly larger than the average house, it was easily large enough to call it a mansion. It had a simple opulence to it, showing that while they were a wealthy family, they didn't lord that fact over others. The rooms were all furnished with elegant, yet simply furniture and utilities. The walls were decorated with motifs of the House of Bones Coat of Arms,



and there were several pieces of tasteful artwork spread out around the mansion.

"I take it this is your room?" asked Harry as Susan showed him a room that was painted a very pale shade of yellow. It was decorated with a few wizarding posters, a book shelf lined one wall, and a dresser sat next to a decent sized bed. There was a desk placed next to a window that overlooked a courtyard filled with gardens, and two doors that Harry suspected led to a walk in closet and lu respectively.

"Yes..." Susan mumbled, so softly Harry might have missed it were it not for his acute hearing.

Harry smiled. "It's nice. I love the view." Looking over at the red head he grinned and held out his arm. "Would you mind showing me around the courtyard?"

Susan blushed, heavily. In fact, to Harry it looked like her face had taken on the same hue as a red sun. However, she nodded and demurely placed her hand on his arm. Having been raised in a pureblood family, it was clear that Susan knew proper etiquette. Though Harry suspected she had never really used it except at maybe a few functions her aunt took her too.

They walked out of her room and took several hallways and walked through a few rooms. Harry noticed that the rooms they passed through were all ones he would expect to see in a fifteenth century home, a parlor, a buttery, a saucery, they even went through a scullery where several house elves were humming happily as they cleaned clothes. Eventually they made their way to a porch, a small outdoor area that was fenced off. There was gate that led out into the courtyard. The two passed the gate and began walking among the tall hedge bushes that lined the courtyard.

"Being at your house I feel almost like I've stepped into the fifteenth century," Harry said with a chuckle.

"Are muggle mansions different?" asked Susan.

"I wouldn't know," Harry answered her. "I've never seen a mundane mansion from the inside. However, many of them do look different on the outside. More modern, I would have to say." He smiled at her,

causing the cute red head to blush again, something Harry noticed she did often in his presence. He filed it away for later and said, "it's actually pretty cool."

Susan looked at him oddly after that comment, but shrugged it off, likely figuring it was a muggle thing. Or a Harry thing. She looked up at the sun for a moment before saying, "we've been out here for a while. Aunties probably looking for us."

"Then I guess we should return to her," Harry said with a sigh. He had been hoping to stay out a little longer and admire the flowers. While he may not be as interested in Herbology as their friend Neville, he loved gardening.

They hadn't even reached the fence leading back to the porch when a house-elf wearing a frock with the Bones Coat of Arms on it popped in front of them. "Mistress Susan, Mistress Amelia wants to see you and Mr. Potter in the parlor."

"Ok, tell Auntie we'll be right there. Thank you for informing me, Cassy," Susan said. The House elf now named Cassy nodded before disappearing with a pop. "Come on, Harry," Susan began walking again.

They made their way into the parlor, just a few seconds ahead of Ms. Bones who stomped into the room with an angry look on her face. The moment her eyes landed on them she stomped over, and Harry got the distinct impression she was angry, which was only further proved when she thrust his memory into his hands.

Before either he or Susan could ask what was wrong, Ms. Bones exploded. "The nerve of that man! Placing such a valuable and potentially dangerous magical artifact in Hogwarts! And to have a... a... a child face that... thing! I can't believe Dumbledore would be so reckless and... stupid!"

Harry grinned, feeling vindicated that an adult felt the same way he did. "That's what I told him," he said. Ms. Bones stopped ranting and turned to Harry. Shrugging, the raven haired wizard continued, saying, "I sort of went off on Dumbledore, telling him in no uncertain terms how reckless and stupid his decision to hide the Sorcerer's Stone in Hogwarts was." Turning serious a second later he asked, "I

have to ask though, what do you plan on doing with this information?"

"There isn't much I can do," Ms. Bones said with a shrug, talking much more calmly now. "I can't arrest Dumbledore for keeping a magic artifact like the Sorcerer's Stone at Hogwarts. It's not a dark artifact so it's technically not illegal. And I certainly can't go to the Ministry and claim Voldemort is still alive and in Wraith form. Even with your memory as evidence, maybe even especially with your memory it would cause... problems for the Ministry."

Harry nodded, pleased she had already come to that conclusion. "That's good, I was going to ask that you keep it to yourself anyways." At Mr. Bones raised eyebrow he elaborated. "Even if you did go to the Ministry and inform them of this, it would simply cause more harm than good. Lucius Malfoy has the Minister's ear, and from what I've heard of him from Susan and others, that man is a Death Eater through and through."

"Yes," Ms. Bones agreed. "He is at that. Thanks to the law, I'm not allowed to convict him because he was already sentenced and proven... innocent." The way she said the word innocent with such distaste let Harry know how innocent she thought Lucius really was. "And if he found out that Voldemort was alive, no doubt the slippery man would find a way back to his Master." She sighed, "it disgusts me that our Ministry allows people like him to walk free when they should be in Azkaban."

Harry found himself in full agreement with the strict yet fair woman. One of the first things he planned on changing in the Ministry was their justice system. From what he had heard of the judiciary practice there were some serious problems with it. All someone needed to get out of jail was the ability to toss around a lot of money and the claim that they were under the imperious curse. When he came in to power within the Ministry, that would no longer be possible.

"I would hate for my time with you two to be spoiled by talk of such foul men," Harry said, deciding to take a partial lead. It was a bit out of propriety but he felt the situation warranted it. "Why don't we share a meal and discuss more pleasant topics."

Ms. Bones smiled as she said, "you're right, Harry. You've been very pleasant company and I would hate for your first time with us to end on such a sour note."

"First time?" asked Harry in a joking tone. "Does that sound like an invite to come over again?"

Ms. Bones gave him a rare grin as and said, "take it however you please, Mr. Potter. Now, let's get some food in our stomachs."

XoX

Dinner with the Bones' after that was pleasant. Harry, with some help from Susan regaled Ms. Bones, who during dinner insisted on Harry calling her Amelia, with several stories of the many things he had done at Hogwarts. Though the raven haired youth agreed to do so only if she would stop calling him 'Mr. Potter' on the claim that it made him feel old.

He told her many of the things he had accomplished, and some of the goals he hoped to complete before leaving Hogwarts. The one that intrigued Amelia the most was Harry's wish to break down all of the barriers that separated the houses from each other. His claim that sorting children based on their traits adversely affected how that child would grow up, and after giving examples – many of which revolved around Voldemort and his Death Eaters – she wholeheartedly agreed with him.

Through out it all Susan spent most of her time as a spectator to the pairs engaging conversation. While she knew she shouldn't be, Susan felt awed by Harry as he spoke with his aunt. To her, her aunt had always been the epitome of what a witch should be; poised, powerful, confident and skilled in what she did. She was a leader among witches and one of the few females to gain such a high position within the Ministry, second only to Minister Bagnold who held the position of Minister of Magic.

Yet here was Harry, a boy her age who was speaking to her aunt as an equal. Like most of his friends, Susan knew better then to place him on a pedestal due to his defeat against Voldemort. It was one of the few and true ways to anger the raven haired youth. Instead, Susan admired Harry for his intelligence, his friendly personality and how he was always willing to help others. While she would never

associate Harry with the one year old baby who defeated Voldemort – especially after his words when they first met on the Hogwarts Express – he was everything she had thought he would be.

When it was time for Harry to leave, the three of them made their way to the foyer. Harry held out his hand for Amelia to shake, which her auntie took a moment later. "Harry, it's been a pleasure having you here tonight. I truly hope this won't be a one time affair, and that you will pay us a visit some time soon."

"Thank you for having me, Amelia," Harry said. He held a frown from crawling onto his face. Even now, he still disliked calling one of his elders by their first name. "And so long as I'm welcome I would love to come over."

"And we would love to have you," Amelia was quick to reply. She smirked a second later and said, "and I know my niece would love it if you paid us another visit."

With their attention now on her, Susan squeaked and a prominent blush rose to her face. She took a moment to curse herself for making such a scene – a silent act which she had been doing since Harry's arrival – but tried her best to remain poised. Meaning she didn't squeak when she said, "I wouldn't mind it if you came to visit me – us – again, Harry."

Amelia smirked at her nieces slip while Harry favored the red head with a smile.

'God that smile,' Susan thought to herself. 'It should be illegal.'

"So long as you're ok with it, Sue, I would love to come visit again," Harry said. Then he did the most embarrassing thing that had ever happened in Susan's short life. He grabbed her hand and brushed his lips against it in a kiss. The kiss only lasted a second, but it was enough that Susan felt her face begin to burn, and she was almost sure she would come down with a fever.

She didn't even notice when he disappeared within the floo, her eyes focusing more on her hand where she could still feel the tingle of Harry's lips. It took an idle comment from her Auntie to snap her focus back to reality. "He's such a polite young man," she said.

"Yeah..." Susan agreed, not fully aware of what she was saying, but agreeing with her Aunt nonetheless.

Amelia smirked at her niece. "You know, your quite lucky to have found a man like Harry. He'll be a keeper when he get's older."

"Yeah..." It was only after a few seconds of thought that Susan realized what her aunt had said. When she did her eyes widened and she stared accusingly at her aunt, her face taking on the same color as fruit punch. "Auntie!"

Amelia just grinned at her niece, causing Susan to huff and stomp up the stairs to her room. Her face flushed when she heard her aunt's laughter accompany her up the stairs and quickly shut her door so she wouldn't have to hear it.

Susan leaned against the door, her face beat red and her breathing a little heavy. After a while she made her way to the bed, which she fell on top of face first before rolling on her back. Looking up at her ceiling, which had a large image of a badger on it that had been animated to run, a smile crossed her face. She held her hand up and studied it. "He kissed me," she said with a sigh. "I wonder what it would be like if he kissed me on the..." her hand went to her lips.

"Do you now?"

Susan's eyes widened as she shot up off the bed. She looked over to the door to see her hand had secretly slipped into her room. The embarrassed shout of "AUNTIE!" was soon heard all through out the house, causing the many house-elves working in the Bones Manor to pause and wonder what the yelling was about.

XoX

## Chapter 7: Troubles of a Preteen Witch

XoX

One could never claim Tracey Davis was patient. Her parents had often accused her of having a distinct lack of patience when it came to anything. When she wanted something, she wanted it now. When she planned on doing something, it was almost impossible for her to get ready because she simply wanted to do whatever it was she had planned the second after she planned it. Yes, Tracey Davis was an impatient girl.

Which was why she scowled when her head lifted itself from the bed and looked at the clock, only to notice that a single minute had passed since the last time she looked at the infernal object for which she held a most passionate hatred.

Many would likely wonder why she was feeling so impatient, more so than usual, a feat most people (Namely Daphne, Blaise and her parents) felt should be impossible for the simply fact that Tracey had all the patience of a house elf that wanted something to clean. The answer was rather simple, and would not surprise those who knew her in the least.

She had just recently gotten her letters returned by Harry Potter. This might not seem like such a big deal to some people, and most twelve year old girls would not feel a letter from a boy was that important. However, there were several facts that made the letters she received very important to her.

The first reason being that she had sent nearly six letters in the last two months and had not yet gotten a reply. The fact that Harry – who she knew to be concise and timely in all things – had not replied to any of her letters made her angry. That anger had turned to worry when she found out that her friends, all of her friends and not just Daphne and Blaise, had yet to receive a letter from him either. Her thoughts had immediately become concerned. So much so that her mom and dad had made several attempts to keep her from staying up all night worrying for her friend.

Had something happened to Harry? Why wasn't he responding to anyone's letters? Had He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named found another person to possess and attacked him? She would admit, the last

question was a bit far-fetched, but considering what she had learned at Hogwarts last year knew it was also a possibility.

It had been a relief when Harry's familiar had flown into her bedroom one night, so much so that Tracey had been sure she cried (though she would never admit to crying to anyone). She had gone over to the beautiful snowy owl and immediately torn into the letters with a gusto and zeal that she was sure her friend Blaise would tease her about if he ever found out. She had read the letters over, and if she were honest with herself, she had been slightly disappointed.

Tracey had been hoping to find out why her friend had been so later in delivering his letters. She had expected something along the lines 'sorry I couldn't get this letter to you Tracey, I had to fight a horde of Death Eaters. But I'm alright now.' Or something to that effect. Maybe not that exact problem, because if Death Eaters had gone after Harry then she would have just died of fright, but she had expected an answer for his long absence.

What she had gotten instead was a rather vague letter in which Harry apologized for his absence. He hadn't said why, or when, or where, only that he there had been a slight altercation with his mail. There had been many a theory Tracey had come up with about why Harry would have a problem with his mail, some silly bordering on the ridiculous, and others that she thought were a distinct possibility.

Her first thought on her friends mail problem was that he might have too much fan mail. She knew for a fact that many people in the wizarding world sent Harry fan mail daily, he had to receive at least one thousand letters of mail from adoring fans a day. She knew this, because when Tracey was younger – around nine or so – she, along with Daphne (who had gone along with her friends half-brained scheme to meet Harry Potter) had sent their own letters. She had never received a reply, and it was during her remembrance of that when Tracey realized that Harry had never gotten any of his fan mail. Which meant he likely had wards that repelled any type of mail that was not recognized as friendly.

With her first theory on what Harry's mail problem might be, she had come up with another. She had come up with the theory that someone was intercepting his mail before it reached him. This one felt plausible to her, after all, Harry was a world renowned figure, a symbol of hope to the people of Britain. It was quite possible some



kind of stalker had stolen his mail for whatever reason, or maybe one of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's spies had done so. It was a distinct possibility and one she had thought most likely.

And she had been right. A few days after receiving Harry's letter Blaise sent one of his own, claiming Celestine had found Harry shopping for school supplies in Diagon Alley. Tracey had dutifully ignored the name of Blaise's sister, knowing that if she thought on the admittedly beautiful girl and what that cradle robbing slag was doing to Harry, her thoughts would turn violent. Instead she had focused on the rest of Blaise's letter.

Apparently Harry's mail had been intercepted, by a house elf of all things! Now while Tracey was a half blood, her father was still a pureblood, and though they were not members of the main family in the House of Davis, they were still a part of a pure-blood family. She, much like her two friends Daphne and Blaise, had been taught plenty on pure-bloods. She knew much about their life, and consequently, she knew about house-elves and how they were used as servants to the larger pureblood families.

Which was why Tracey had been understandably skeptical. Unless ordered to, a house elf would not be capable of intercepting someone's mail. Which meant Harry was either lying by trying to cover up for the something, or he was telling the truth. Harry had never lied to her before, so she had decided to believe him. Of course, that opened up a whole slew of problems and conspiracy theories in Tracey's mind. Everything from assassination plots to someone trying to cut Harry off from the world so they could take over his identity for some nefarious purpose. The dark haired girl blamed her mom for taking her to watch all of those muggle movies she loved so much, James Bond, Tracey believed they were called.

With her mind going in circles trying to think up more and more conspiracies to hurt Harry, which had begun getting more and more ludicrous as time went on, she had decided to focus on other, more pleasant activities. Namely, corresponding with Harry and her other friends. It was nearing the end of summer, with only two more weeks before school started again, and she and Harry had been sending letters back and forth ever since his 'house mail stealing house elf' problem had been solved.

Which brought her to now.

Her mom and dad had found out she had been corresponding with Harry. To be more specific, they had gotten ahold of one of her letters when Harry's owl had come in through the kitchen window – her bedroom window had been closed at the time – while she was out. As if it wasn't bad enough that her mom had gotten ahold of her letter, the situation had degraded even further because her mom had read Harry's letter, which was private and for her eyes only, thank you very much!

She had been thoroughly teased by her mom after that, who kept telling her how sweet it was that Tracey had a boyfriend, and made several comments on how Harry was 'a keeper' and that she should keep a tight leash on him lest someone else steal him. Tracey was sure her face had been so red it would explode, whether from anger or embarrassment not even she was sure, the emotions having been so jumbled she had been straddling the line between strangling her mom and running up to her room and crying.

However, one good thing had come from her mom's teasing, the suggestion that Tracey should invite Harry over. That single solitary suggestion, made as an inane comment designed to tease Tracey more, had been enough that the twelve year old Slytherin's emotional disposition had done a full one-eighty. She had gone from wanting to strangle her mom, to wanting to kiss her.

She had left her parents after that and sent a letter off to Harry, asking if he could come over to her house and spend the day with her. Now here she was, in her room, all dressed up, waiting. Waiting for Harry Potter to show up, which would be...

"forty-five more minutes!" Tracey groaned when she looked at the clock yet again. She swore on Merlin's grave that if that stupid clock didn't turn soon she would hex it. Making pitiful whining noises, Tracey lay her head back down and closed her eyes. Maybe if she did that and counted to ten, the stupid clock would show the right time.

XoX

"Tracey!"

Jerking awake with a startled cry, Tracey looked around, for a second wondering where she was.

"Tracey."

At the sound of her mom's voice, Tracey realized she must have fallen asleep. She wondered how long she had slept before her mother knocked on the door, calling her name out again.

"What is it, mom?" asked Tracey, internally grumbling about annoying mothers who were too loud.

"I just thought I would let you know that your boyfriend is here!" her mom called out in a sing song voice.

Tracey felt her face heating up as she yelled, "he's not my boy -" She paused mid sentence. There was only one person her mother had ever teased about being her boyfriend. Eyes widening, she jumped off her bed and dashed over to the large, body length mirror that was standing on the opposite side of her room.

She quickly did her best to straighten up, cursing herself for falling asleep. Now she had bed hair! With a growl, she grabbed the brush on her night stand and did what she could to fix her tangled and knotted hair before rushing towards the door. She grabbed the handle, and, with hard yank, the door flew open.

"Where is he!" asked Tracey, her eyes searching the hall.

"Where is who dear?" asked her mom, a mischievous grin on her face.

"Don't give me that, woman! Where is Harry!" said Tracey, practically shouting at her mother.

"You mean your boyfriend?" asked her mom, her grin widening. Tracey was just about to lay into her mom when she said, "I believe he's down in the living room with your father."

That was all the incentive Tracey needed to begin rushing down the hallway, her mother's comment about Harry being her boyfriend forgotten. Racing down the stairs, and sometimes skipping two or

even three steps at a time, Tracey Davis rushed towards the living room where she found him.

There, not even two meters away, was Harry Potter, sitting with her father and talking about something. She took a moment to look at him, wearing a silver and green wizarding robe, Slytherin colors. She knew Harry hated the houses; she could see it in the way he talked whenever someone brought the subject up. But even still, seeing him in those colors made her wonder what it would be like if he had been sorted into Slytherin. And she had to admit, he looked good in green and silver.

Then she was off.

"Harry!" she shouted as her legs propelled her towards the raven haired boy. Hearing her shout Harry and her father both stood up, Harry being quite a bit faster than her dad. She noticed his stance shift a bit, before catching sight of her and shifting again. His eyes widened. Then she jumped.

"Trace – oof!" Harry wasn't even able to say her name before she was on him. He stumbled slightly, before managing to catch himself. Tracey's arms went around his neck and her legs locked themselves against his lower back. She placed her head on his shoulder, taking in a deep breath. Harry always had a unique scent, slightly musky with a hint of what smelled like a freshly cut pine. She absently wondered if it was from his soap, some kind of deodorant, or if that was just how he naturally smelled. And it was it just her, or had Harry gotten more muscular since the last time she had jumped on him?

"Tracey, good to see you again," Harry said, his voice lightly muffled by her hair. "Now could you please get off!"

"Let me think about it..." Tracey said, grinning as she closed her eyes. Her legs and arms tightened their hold around him, no doubt alerting him to her answer. She gave it to him anyways, saying, "nope!"

At those words Harry began trying to shake the girl off. "Come! On! Tracey! Get! Off!"

"Not on your life!" Tracey shouted as tightened her hold even further. "Consider this your punishment for not sending me, or anyone else, a letter for two months!"

The battle between the two would have lasted further were it not for a cough from Tracey's dad and a giggle from her mom.

"Why don't you get off the poor boy, Tracey," her dad said. Of course, that comment was completely offset by her mom's 'oh I don't know. I think they look cute that way.' However, it was her mom's comment that made her remember that both of her parents were there, with them, watching as she jumped on Harry. And it was ultimately her comment that made Tracey jump off her friend like a muggle bullet fired from a gun.

"Aww," her mom said with a pout. "I was hoping you two would stay like that so I could go get the camera..."

"Don't you dare!" Tracey said, pointing an accusing finger at her mother while her face took on the same general coloring as Susan Bones' hair. She knew what her mom was up to, wanting to take an embarrassing photo so she could show it off to her friends. The last time she had done that, it was a picture of when she was nine and had gotten a bee sting on her rear because they had forgotten to cast a bug repellent charm on her. That had been embarrassing enough; she didn't need her mom showing her friends a picture of her jumping on Harry Potter to add further humiliation to her.

"It's a moot point now anyways," her mom said. However, Tracey was not fooled by her mom's seemingly uncaring attitude. She was sneaky, Tracey knew. Her mom was simply going to wait for another opportunity to take an embarrassing photo of the two of them together. Tracey would have to be careful around her.

"Well," her dad began, clapping his knees and standing up. "Now that Tracey is up, why don't we show Harry around the house?"

"An excellent idea dear!" her mom said, leaning over and kissing her dad on the cheek. Tracey felt like gagging, she always hated it when her parents displayed affection of any kind for each other. They were so old, and old people just shouldn't show affection like that.

Her mother looked at Harry and smiled. "Well, how about a tour, Harry?"

"I would love one, Ms. Davis," Harry said respectfully, not that Tracey had expected any less. Harry was always respectful towards older people. Though she couldn't fathom why.

The next hour or so was spent showing Harry around her house. Because her family was a branch of House Davis, they didn't have the luxury that the more elite – how she loathed that word – pureblood families had. And the House of Davis was not an ancient, or even a noble house to begin with. Their family was relatively new, having only come into being within the last fifty years or so.

However, while her house was not a mansion, and many wouldn't consider it very large, it was a decent sized two story house. It was a fairly new house, only two or so decades old, and was well furnished with muggle appliances and furniture, all of which had been charmed by her mom – who Tracey had to admit was a genius when it came to house hold charms. It had been cheaper then buying furniture in the wizarding world, and she personally thought the quality was better then their magical counterparts anyways.

Looking over at Harry who was walking alongside her, Tracey studied the features of the boy who had flipped Hogwarts and her world on it's head. Like every other young girl, she had grown up on the stories of Harry Potter. Her mother must have told her the story of the Dark Lords defeat nearly a hundred times – which she now knew were not true – each retelling more having grown more dramatic and out of proportion then the last. Like almost all girls her age, she had one time dreamed of having Harry Potter sweeping her off her feet and becoming Ms. Potter. Even Daphne had gone through that phase, though her blond friend would vehemently deny having ever carried a crush on Harry Potter after a while.

Having met the real Harry Potter she had grown out of her crush on a figure that didn't really exist. At first, she would admit to being disappointed. To meet Harry Potter in the flesh only to find out that all of the stories of him living in a magical castle and learning the spells that only the most powerful wizards could ever learn, or stories about him taming dragons, and fighting trolls and Death Eaters alike had all been a lie. Well, it was certainly a dream crusher for any Harry Potter fan.

In fact, her first impression of Harry had been that he was something of a jerk, not at all what she thought he would be. Though, she figured it would be more accurate to say that her first impression of Harry Potter when she realized she was actually talking to Harry Potter had been that he was a jerk.

Thinking back on their second meeting, she could see why he had been annoyed. Harry was as new to the wizarding world as a muggle-born. He knew nothing of magic, and hadn't known of his fame until he first stepped into Diagon Alley. And from what she had been told of that experience, it had not been something he would want to repeat. Coming into the magical world and learning that you were famous for killing someone when you were a baby, and having people make up all these stories about you (and make money off said stories) without your knowledge. Yes, Tracey could see why he had been annoyed with her.

However, after their second meeting she had done her best to forget about him. Harry had been sorted into Gryffindor, and she into Slytherin. That had pretty much dashed any remaining hope of getting to know Harry Potter, because if there was one thing Tracey knew, Gryffindor and Slytherin did not mix.

This had not stopped her from complaining to Daphne, however, much to said girl's displeasure. Tracey had taken many an opportunity to harp on her friend about how unfair the world was. Her complaining had only stopped when Daphne told her she sounded like the rest of those 'slags who were lusting after Harry' as the blond Slytherin had called them. After that Tracey had stopped complaining about not being in the same house as Harry, though she had taken every opportunity she had in their shared classes to watch Harry.

The first thing she had learned from watching the boy was that he was intelligent, perhaps even one of those geniuses that could have ended up going to a muggle college and graduating at the age of ten. He was the first one to get a spell right in class, and he always made it look so easy. He never seemed to struggle with spells as she did, and if she were honest, she had felt very jealous of his talent and her lack thereof.

Then he had flipped the world on its head. Harry Potter had just finished utterly humiliating Malfoy on a broom one day – something she still laughed about – and then, just a day after that had invited her, Daphne and Blaise to a study session with him and his friends. At first, she had thought it was to play a prank of some kind, and Daphne had been positive it was. But curiosity had won out over caution that day, and so she had gone to the study session (dragging her two friends along with her). It was easily the best decision she had ever made.

After that day she had made a friend in Harry, and consequently, became friends with all of his friends. Harry didn't care that she had been sorted into Slytherin, he didn't care that she was half-blood, in fact Tracey was positive that Harry didn't care about status of any kind. All that seemed to matter to him was that you not put him on a pedestal.

And she could see why. With his fame, combined with his top scores in class, his amazing talent on a broom and his good (if you were to listen to every girl within Hogwarts) looks, Harry was already subject to the awe of many students at Hogwarts. Combined that with the story of him facing off against a troll – which Tracey had learned from Harry himself was true – creating a room where everyone from any house could go to, being a generally friendly and approachable person, and facing off against the Dark Lord... again, and it only caused his already big legend to grow. Despite being a school student, to many of his peers Harry Potter was a myth as big as Merlin.

And because of this he needed friends. Everyone else saw Harry as this mythical figure, a being who was powerful and handsome and fought evil at every turn. Only a few saw Harry. Which she realized was why he made such a large effort into being friends with her and the others, and why he was so selective of who he actually chose to be his friends.

While Tracey was not that observant, her friend Daphne was, and the blond girl had informed her of these observations. She, Blaise and Daphne had not been some random selection of people that Harry felt might make good friends. They had been studied, observed, and carefully selected as people Harry felt would make good friends. He had surrounded himself with powerful people; Susan, the niece of Amelia Bones, Head of the DMLE; Daphne and



Blaise, both came from powerful and wealthy pureblood families who were considered Dark-neutral; Neville Longbottom, whose Grandmother was the head of an alliance of light-sided neutral families and the head of an ancient and noble house. All of them were from different social standings, be they political or otherwise and it had told her one thing. Harry Potter was building a power base in Hogwarts.

At first she had been worried. Tracey did not have any kind of political influence, nor did she have Hermione's intelligence. She was just Tracey, a slightly above average student with a talent in potions and transfiguration, and a problem in Charms. What if she had nothing to offer Harry that could help him with whatever he was trying to accomplish? Her fears had been allayed slightly with the fact that Harry spent more time with her than he did Blaise or Daphne. That may have had something to do with the fact that she went out of her way to talk to him, but the fact that he didn't seem to mind, and never brought her two friends up had allayed her fears. The addition of Padma Patil, Terry Boot and Lisa Turpin, none of whom had any political pull either had also helped put her mind at ease. While a part of Harry was building a power, she was sure that he also just wanted friends he could trust.

And so she had forgotten her worries and spent the rest of her time having fun. She played with, spent time with, and studied with Harry and everyone else. She had never had so much fun in her life, her first year at Hogwarts had easily been the best year she had ever lived. And there had been some added benefits. Tracey was in the top ten students of the first year class, even her charms class was higher than most everyone else's. Her only real problem had been Professor Binns History classes, and really, only book worms like Harry, Hermione and Daphne would get good grades in that class.

"And these are some pictures that I've taken of our family through out the years."

Hearing her moms voice, Tracey was brought back to reality.

Only to wish she could retreat back into her mind as she realized where they were. It was a lone section of wall in a less used part of the house. Along that wall were pictures, but not just any pictures. No these were pictures of her, every embarrassing moment, compromising position, or bare backed picture her mother had ever

taken of her was on the wall. From baby pictures of her in the bath, running around in the nude, to her more recent pictures of her at the age of nine jumping around on her bed singing into a spoon.

And it was worse because they were all magical. Her baby pictures were splashing, squealing, crying, kicking their feet, all of them doing the activities babies did. Those weren't as bad as her other ones though. The one where she was jumping around on a bed and singing into her spoon was the worst. She was in nothing but her skivvies, ignoring the world around her as she sung her heart out. Only for a flash of light to catch her attention and turn towards the camera with a 'dear in the headlights' look.

Oh her mom was going to pay for showing Harry these.

"What do you think, Harry?" asked her mom.

Tracey turned to Harry, a horrified look on her face. She was slightly surprised to see he was so calm. He was looking at the pictures without a hint of embarrassment. She knew he could feel it, she had seen him blush before. Tracey wondered why these pictures didn't bother him.

He seemed to sense her staring at him, because Harry turned his head a second later and smiled at her. "I think they remind me a lot of the wall of shame at my friend Lisa's house," he said. "There's a similar wall there, that shows all of the embarrassing pictures of me and my friend when we were little."

"Oh..." Tracey couldn't help the grin that made it's way to her face at the disappointed tone in her mother's voice. While she was still embarrassed, mortified even, that Harry had seen these photos, she was at least glad he didn't make a big deal out of them.

Her mom sighed. "Why don't you two go off and have some fun while I make dinner?" she suggested. A sly smile made it's way to her face as she said, "don't do anything I wouldn't do." Tracey rolled her eyes at what her mom was trying to insinuate. She had to hand it to the woman, she didn't give up easily.

"Come on," she said to Harry, grabbing his hand and pulling him along with her. Harry didn't resist her pulling as they moved through the house. Tracey thought about taking Harry to her room, but

discarded it a moment later with a blush. If she brought Harry to her room, there was no telling the amount of teasing she would receive from her mom. Instead she decided to take him out to the back porch, a small area with a hammock and a bench, overlooking a decent sized backyard.

"I'm sorry about my mom," Tracey said as she sat down on the bench with a sigh. "She can be so annoying."

"Don't worry about her too much," Harry said, grinning he jumped on the hammock, making it swing back and forth. He moved himself into a more comfortable position before continuing. "From what I understand, parents are supposed to embarrass their kids. And it's not like you can do anything about it."

While Harry's words made her feel a little better, she still wasn't completely mollified. Especially when she realized that she had zoned out for nearly the entire tour. "She didn't say anything too embarrassing, did she?" asked Tracey, wondering if her mother had told him any embarrassing stories about her.

"No," Harry said, "she didn't say anything." Tracey gave a sigh of relief, which was sucked back in when the raven haired youth continued, saying, "and she definitely didn't tell me about the time a bee stung your bum when you were nine."

Tracey felt her entire body heat up like a furnace, and it only got worse when Harry began laughing. "It's not funny!" she shouted, trying to regain her lost dignity. However, that task was proving to be impossible as her friend continued laughing at her expense. Growling at him, Tracey lunged from the bench and jumped onto the hammock. She got on top of him and began what more or less amount to a wrestling match.

What began with Tracey trying to... well, she wasn't exactly sure what she had been trying to do. Her reaction had been more instinctual than anything. Whatever it was didn't work however, as Harry had managed to roll her over and got on top, where he proceeded to tickle her mercilessly.

"Hahahaha!... Harry... Haha!... Stop... I can't... hahah... can't breath!" Tracey gasped out as she wiggled and squirmed under him.

"I'd really rather not," Harry said with a grin. His hands went to her sides where they found Tracey's weakness and attacked her. As the dark haired girl began to howl in laughter, he continued, saying, "you're far too violent to just stop without leaving you defenseless and at my mercy. Perhaps if you surrender and agree not to do anything untoward, I'll let you go."

"HAHAHA! NEVER!" Tracey shouted in between laughs. He may think he was all high and mighty, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of seeing her give in. however, this left her in a bit of a bind. If she didn't manage to get Harry off, she was almost positive she would die from a lack of air, or pass out. Either of those happening would be embarrassing and she needed to do something fast.

She quickly began bucking and thrashing, a violent action which caused the hammock to flip over. Harry landed on his back with a loud 'oof!' while Tracey fell on top of him. For several long moments the two of them had just lain there, Tracey trying to regain her breath and Harry blinking the spots out of his eyes.

"Ha..." Tracey said in a breathless but triumphant tone. "See what... happens... when you mess... with me..."

"They get a headache?" guessed Harry, shaking his head back and forth.

"No... well, yes," Tracey admitted, seeing Harry holding his head. "But not what I was talking about." Sitting up she grinned down at him and poked Harry in the chest. "They lose – Ah!" Letting out a loud shriek, Tracey found herself being rolled onto her back, with Harry now sitting on her. She immediately tried to push him off but he pinned her hands down and grinned.

"Who loses?" he asked, smirking at her. If she had use of her hands Tracey would be sure to wipe that smug look off his face. She was thinking of doing just that before a bright flash caught the pairs attention.

The pair turned, eyes wide as the saw Tracey's mom and dad standing before the door leading back inside. Tracey's mom had an satisfied smile on her face as the magical camera in her hand shot

out the picture. "Ah..." she said with a mischievous air as she shook the picture out. "This picture is going to look sooo cute on my wall."

Harry, his face red all the way down to his neck, stood up and offered Tracey his hand. When she accepted and he finished pulling her up, he dusted her off and said, "why don't you say we call a truce and get that picture from your mom before it's fully developed?"

It took a few moments for Tracey to answer, mainly because she was even more embarrassed then she had ever been before. However, once she felt some semblance of dignity – or maybe it was just her inability to accept defeat that was rearing it's head – she gave the raven haired boy a grim smile. "Harry, I like the way you think."

XoX

Neither Harry nor Tracey ever managed to snatch the picture from Tracey's mother, though certainly not for lack of trying. The pair had spent nearly an hour chasing the giggling woman around the house. She had led them on a merry chase, allowing them to get close in order to make them think they might be able to catch her, only for them to stumble when she would disappear to another part of the house with a crack. Harry had gotten close once, managing to brush against her robes, but eventually the pair had been forced to concede defeat.

Dinner was a riotous affair. It was much more lively than dinner had been with Amelia and Susan Bones. Tracey and her mom were extraordinarily talkative. One of the things he had noticed about Tracey's mom was that she was just as mischievous and outgoing as her daughter. Harry doubted his friend noticed it, and she would probably deny it if told, but she was almost an exact replication of her mother. The two of them would talk and argue and tell stories and interrupt each other in an ongoing struggle to be the center of attention.

It was also apparent that they were like this all the time, an obvious conclusion he had come to by the fond look at Mr. Davis' face. He was much more quiet and observative than his wife and daughter, but that seemed to be a good thing as he served as a balance for the two females' more outgoing nature.

Throughout dinner, Harry got to listen to the many stories that Ms. Davis would tell, many of them embarrassing ones about Tracey. Meanwhile, said girl would often do her utmost to interrupt her mother's storytelling, normally through the use of shouting and threats that both knew she couldn't do.

All too soon, dinner came to an end, and Harry found himself standing in the living room beside the fireplace that was connected to the floor. "Thank you for inviting me over, Mr. and Mrs. Davis," he said, shaking Mr. Davis hand and giving Mrs. Davis a kiss on hers.

"No need to thank us," Mr. Davis said. "It was refreshing having another male in the house. I often find myself outnumbered with these two."

Mrs. Davis patted her husband on the cheek, before turning to Harry with a smile. "Yes, don't mention it. Watching my daughter flounder her way through love, this has been the most fun I've had in a while."

"Mooom!" Tracey said in a threatening tone that Harry suspected Mrs. Davis was used to. She didn't seem to be bothered in the least, and even had a smile on her face. Though he was sure part of the reason was because Tracey was still a kid, and her kid at that. "I'm warning you..."

"Oh relax, Tracey dear," Mrs. Davis said placating, her smile still in place. "I'm happy for you. With any luck, you and Harry will have a long loving relationship much like me and Nathan here."

The two twelve year-olds quickly blushed, and Tracey gave a loud groan of, "moooom!"

Said woman just giggled and grabbed her husbands arm. "Come on, dear. Why don't give these two love birds some quiet time."

As Mrs. Davis left with her husband in tow, Tracey turned to Harry. "I swear that woman... if she weren't my mom I'd hex her!"

"Which hexes would you use?" asked Harry.

"Every single one I know!" Tracey declared.

"So basically, all of the first year hexes," Harry deadpanned. Tracey blushed. The first year hexes didn't do much, the most dangerous one was the leg-locking jinx because there was the possibility of someone being able to trip another down something like a flight of stairs to cause serious injury.

"Yeah, well, I'll just learn more this year, then I'll hex her," Tracey mumbled.

"Well good luck with that," Harry said. They both trailed off as an awkward silence hit them.

"So... I'll uh, I guess I'll see you on the Hogwarts express?" said Tracey, suddenly feeling a little awkward. Goodbyes had never really been her thing.

"Yeah," Harry bit his lip for a moment, before giving her a hug. He wasn't sure if he should, especially considering Mrs. Davis' insinuation about him and Tracey being a couple had brought back to uncomfortable feelings Angeline had given him about females and physical affection. Something he had tried to push down so it wouldn't affect his friendship with Lisa, who he knew would be hurt if he suddenly became uncomfortable hugging her. However, he figured since they had already done so before, it would be okay.

Tracey stood stock still for a second before returning it. When they parted, her cheeks were tinged a light pink, and her eyes were looking anywhere but his.

"Well... I guess I'll see you later," Harry said. He stepped back and moved over towards the fireplace, but was stopped when Tracey grabbed his wrist.

"W-wait," Tracey said. Harry turned around, looking at the girl quizzically. Tracey looked around the room, and Harry got the feeling she was trying to see if her mom had decided to hide somewhere in the room. After a moment of not seeing anything out of place, she must have determined that the coast was clear because a second later she leaned in and kissed him on the cheek.

Harry felt his face flush red, and when Tracey pulled away he saw that she was in the same boat. "Uh..." Tracey stuttered, taking a

step back, looking for all the world like a scared animal. "Bye Harry!" The young girl quickly turned on her heels and ran off.

Harry pressed a hand to his cheek, wondering why his face felt so warm. Shaking his head in an effort to clear it, he walked over to the fireplace, grabbed some floo powder, threw it on the fire and when it turned green stepped into it and called out, "the Leaky Cauldron!"

XoX

Tracey slammed the door to her room and quickly climbed into bed. Her heart was beating a mile a minute and felt like it might explode out of her chest. Why had she done that? She had just kissed Harry bloody Potter! A kiss on the cheek, but she was never one to get into semantics. A kiss was a kiss.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid," Tracey muttered, attempting and failing in her effort to get her blush under control. "What possessed you to do something so stupid?"

As Tracey took several long moments to curse herself for her actions, the sound of ruffling when she made a slight movement caught her attention. Frowning in curiosity, her embarrassment forgotten for the moment, Tracey stuck a hand into her back pocket. She pulled out what looked like wrinkled paper. It took a second before she recognized it as a photo. Turning it around she saw that it was the picture her mom had taken of her and Harry that they had both tried to get.

"Harry must have given it to me when he..." she blushed and shook the image of her and Harry hugging out of her mind. They had done so plenty of times, so it shouldn't matter now. Curse her mother for making her feel so embarrassed. She looked at the picture with a thoughtful expression. "I wonder when he got it."

She thought about throwing the picture away, as that would mean her mother had one less photo to embarrass and humiliate her with. Or maybe burning it.

However, after a few moments of thought, Tracey stood up and ducked under her bed. Reaching in she pulled out a decent sized chest, and after keying in the combination to the simple muggle lock, opened it. Inside were several dozen items of memorabilia, pictures



and odd objects that she had found interesting and decided to keep. Looking at the picture, Tracey smiled after a moment, and placed the picture inside.

She wouldn't destroy it, but she sure wasn't going to let her mom use it as ammunition in her teasing.

XoX

Harry yawned as he crawled into bed. He was dressed in a basic pair of pj's, dark green pants with a large black shirt. Slipping under the covers, he was just about to drift off to sleep when the door cracked open.

"Harry?" asked Lisa, her voice a whisper. "Are you still awake?"

"Yes," Harry said. His voice seemed to be her cue, because Lisa made her way inside the room, closing the door and blocking out the light from the hallway. She tiptoed over to the bed he was in, stopping just at the foot, waiting.

Harry sighed as he scooted over and pulled the covers down, allowing Lisa to get slip in. "You know, I don't think your dad's going to approve you sleeping with me anymore. We're not nine." Truthfully he wasn't all that comfortable sleeping with her anymore. With the fact that they were older, combined with Mrs. Davis teasing of him this night, and Angeline's mental scarring of him a few weeks ago, he simply didn't think it was appropriate. Despite this, he couldn't deny his friend wanting comfort, especially when he had been more or less away for the past few days.

"Don't care," Lisa mumbled. She sought him out, and latched onto him like a vice. Harry winced a little as she squeezed too hard, but didn't say anything.

"What's wrong, Lis?" he asked, knowing already that something was up. While she was very clingy, it was normally during the day and only later in the evening when they were relaxing. They hadn't slept together for a long time, the soul exception being last year when Lisa found out Harry was going to a different school then her.

"It's just that I feel like your leaving me behind," Lisa croaked, and Harry felt his shirt get wet by a few of her tears. "Your going off at

this new school, making friends and having fun, I feel like I'm being replaced."

"Oh, Lisa," Harry sighed, he should have known that was what was bothering her. For years now Lisa had been his only real friend, and because of that they had grown much closer in two years than most people do in such a short time period. Harry would admit that he was in some ways just as needy as Lisa was. She had been his anchor, the person who more or less kept him from being insulated and alone. Had she not come into his life, Harry had no doubt that it would have been much harder fitting in with others, because he simply wouldn't have been capable of interacting with people.

You can only learn so much from a book after all.

"I will never leave you behind," he said, petting the girl's hair. "You're my best friend, and you will always be my best friend. And just because I've actually managed to make some friends at school will not change that."

"Promise?" asked Lisa in a small voice.

Harry tucked Lisa's head under his chin, only shuddering slightly as her warm breath hit his neck. The next time he saw Angeline he was going to cast his strongest hex on her for the problems she had unknowingly - or perhaps knowingly - caused him.

"Promise."

XoX

Now I know some of you are getting antsy for the school year to start, and I am pleased to say your wait is now over. This was the last chapter of summer and the next chapter will be Harry getting on the Hogwarts Express. So for those of you who have been waiting for this, cheers.

Also, I am pleased to see that the majority of you actually like Lisa. A few don't, but that's fine, she plays an important role in Harry's development as a person. Just what that role is I won't tell you, because then I would ruin some of the plot. Just know that she is important and has a reason for being here.

Another thing, I am well aware of my problems with 'your' and 'you're'. I have been working on it, but because my mind moves faster than my fingers, I usually end up defaulting to 'your' as a general principle so I can write faster. Is it a bad move on my part? Hells yes. Unfortunately, it's a habit I have yet to break, but I am trying.

ONE LAST THING BEFORE I LEAVE YOU! I'm sure many of you have noticed that Harry is very close to a lot more females than he is males. For those of you who have been wanting to know pairings, while I will not tell you WHO Harry will be paired with, I will inform you that it will be a harem of either 5 to 6 girls. Now, for those of you who are disappointed and will likely be leaving a flaming review of how I'm ruining my story by creating a harem, I would ask you to save it. I have my reasons, not the least of which is that out of all the several thousand harem stories out there, only 5 are even worth the time it takes to read the first chapter, and only 2 of them are really worth reading through to the end. This is not going to be like a majority of those harem fics where Harry has 16 marriage contracts that he MUST fulfill or he loses his magic and dies a horrendous death. Nor will it be a Harry gets a soul bond with Gabrielle, Fleur, or both, and gets to have mass amounts of sex with various women because all Veela are apparently sluts that need sex to survive.

While this may sound arrogant, I believe that I am probably one of the few people who can actually write a harem story without it being an utter smut fest whose sole purpose for being written is to show off Harry screwing a bunch of witches. This will be different, Harry will actually form powerful bonds - NOT SOUL BONDS - of friendship and love with the witches he gets with - if he has not done so already ^\_^ - and not every girl in Harry's circle will end up with him.

I have already decided the pairings, who should be obvious when you read the story, with the exception of one who may or may not end up with him depending on what route I decide to take.

Thank you for your time. Pokemaster12 out.

## Chapter 8: Missing the Hogwarts Express

XoX

It was early in the morning, the sun was just rising above the horizon, and Harry Potter found himself getting ready for the start of a new year at Hogwarts. After taking a hot shower, he entered his room and began getting dressed, choosing a pair of fitted blue jeans, sneakers, a white muscle shirt, and a green collared button-up shirt to go over it. His outfit was finished when he placed the three necklaces he had around his neck.

He paused for a moment as he held the necklace that Angeline had given him in the palm of his hand. It really was rather beautiful, a blood red stone that held an unnatural glow about it, like someone had managed to capture fire inside of it. The jewel was in a Trilliant cut, a triangle with rounded edges, 25 facets on the crown, 19 on the pavilion, and a polished girdle. It really was an astounding gem and Harry had to wonder about the kind of complicated process it would take to create such a jewel.

Sighing, he stuffed the necklace under his shirt, beautiful or not there was no way he would be caught dead wearing something so girly.

He opened the door to his room and walked down the hall and into the kitchen.

"Good morning, Harry," Mrs. Crawft greeted with a smile as she flipped the pancake she was baking on the pan. Unlike last year, he had decided to stay with the Crawfts, mainly so he could say goodbye to Lisa before he left. "I've already made some scrambled eggs for you, just the way you like them, and there's some toast that should be ready in just a minute."

"Thank you, and good morning to you as well," Harry said as he moved into the kitchen to help Mrs. Crawft prepare the table for breakfast.

"Do you think you could do me a favor and wake up Lisa?" Mrs. Crawft asked once they had set up the plates and food on the table.

"Of course; considering you more or less let me stay here this summer, its the least I could do," Harry said, beginning to make his way towards the bedrooms. He moved into Lisa's bedroom and walked up to her bed. His friend was still there, sleeping soundly. She had somehow managed to sprawl herself across the bed, with one leg dangling off the side, one arm hanging off the other side, and her other two limbs resting at an awkward angle that actually looked kind of painful. It made Harry wonder how she could sleep like that.

Grinning, he pulled his mothers wand out of his ankle holster and conjured a bucket of water before placing his wand back in the holster, which vanished as the disillusionment charm was reengaged. Without any form of hesitation, Harry dumped the bucket of cold water onto his friend.

"AH!" Lisa shouted as the cold water hit her. She shot up off the bed and began sputtering and shivering as she looked around for her attacker. Her eyes caught sight of Harry grinning at her, and she cast him a nasty glare that was rendered ineffective by her shivering form.

"Good morning!" Harry chirped in a bright and cheerful manner that caused his friend to gain a tick in her right eye.

"Harry!" Lisa shouted as she began to rub her arms in an attempt to warm herself up. "Why did you do that?"

"Your mum wanted me to wake you up," he answered, the grin on his face never leaving. "She says breakfast will be in about fifteen minutes so you should have some time to take a shower if you're fast enough." As Harry looked at the girl's drenched form, he said, "though I suppose you won't need one now."

"Grrr!" Lisa growled as she attempted to drill a hole in her friend's eye. "I hate you sometimes, you know that?"

"So you say, but I bet after breakfast is over you'll be crying about how much you're going to miss me," Harry said. He began to walk over to the door, looking over his shoulder to say, "Now come on, take a shower so we can have breakfast."

XoX

Breakfast was a quiet affair, with Lisa glaring at Harry as she violently shoved her food in her mouth, Mrs. Crawft looking at the two in amusement, and Mr. Crawft trying to read the paper, though he seemed distracted by the way his daughter was glaring at Harry.

Harry, on the other hand, was eating breakfast as he always did: completely ignoring the way his friend was glaring at him, aside from a small amount of amused glances he cast her way on occasion.

"So Harry," started Mrs. Crawft, trying to contain a giggle as she watched her daughter glare at the raven haired youth. If looks could kill, she was sure Harry would be dead.

"Yes?" asked Harry, turning to look at the woman who was almost like a second mother to him.

"Will you be needing a ride to your school? Or wherever you need to go to get to school?" she asked with a kind smile.

Harry shook his head. "Thank you for the offer but I already plan on taking the bus. And I wouldn't want to impose on you and your family."

"We've been over this already," Mrs. Crawft chided lightly. "You know we have never thought of you as a burden."

"Thank you," Harry said softly. Her words reminded him of the reason he loved staying with the Crawfts so much; they honestly enjoyed his presence and treated him like a son. Were he not so independent, he might have actually taken Mrs. Crawft up on her offer of a ride.

When breakfast ended, Harry helped Mrs. Crawft clean the dishes before heading to the room they let him stay in when he was there. Once the door was closed, he cast a muggle-notice-me-not charm on the door so he could pack without interruption.

He opened the first compartment of his trunk and waved his mother's wand at the closet door. Said door swung open as all of the clothes he had gotten during the summer flew out towards the trunk, neatly folding themselves while en route to their destination. When

all of his clothes were neatly packed, he closed the trunk and looked around.

Harry had kept most of his stuff at the Dursley's, so when Lisa – with permission from her mom – asked if he could spend the night before he had to go back to school, it had been simpler to keep his books and other Wizarding supplies in his trunk rather than leave them out where Lisa or her parents could run into them while cleaning.

He had also kept a glamour charm on his trunk to make it look like a normal muggle trunk, rather than the dragonhide leather-bound one he had.

Seeing that there was nothing left, Harry picked up his trunk and made his way out of the room. The muggle-notice-me-not charm failing as soon as he withdrew his magic.

Moving towards the door, Harry stopped, set down his trunk, and turned around to see Lisa walking up to him. He noticed that she already had tears forming in her eyes. Already knowing what she wanted, Harry moved up to her and pulled her against him, wrapping his arms around the girl as she returned the gesture and began to cry.

"There's no reason to be sad," Harry said as he ran a hand over her hair. He absently wondered why none of his other friends acted like a literal water works when he had said goodbye at the end of the school year. Then again, none of them were quite as close to him as Lisa. They also weren't as needy as she was. "It's not like this is going to be the last time you see me."

"I'm still going to miss you," she muttered, her voice muffled by the fact that she was pressing her face into his shirt. "All last year sucked. I missed you so much, and now you're going to be gone for another year."

"Half a year," Harry corrected, pushing her shoulders to move her away without breaking contact so he could look at her. "I'll be here for Christmas, and this time I'll be able to send letters to you."

"Really? You promise?" she asked, holding out her hand, fingers clenched except for her pinky. "Pinky promise?"

"Pinky promise," Harry said, locking his own digit with hers and shaking.

Lisa sniffed, wiping her nose with her sleeve. "Then I expect you to send me at least two letters a week," she demanded.

Harry laughed. "Fair enough," he said, "two letters a week." Reaching into his back pocket, Harry pulled out small sheet of paper and pressed it into Lisa's hand. When she looked at it curiously he said, "that's the address you need to send any letters to if you want them to get to me."

"Oh," she said, keeping the sheet in her hand. Lisa wrapped her arms around Harry's neck and hugged him again. Harry reciprocated the gesture before they both broke away.

"I'll keep in contact," Harry said, giving the brunette one last smile before he picked up his trunk and left.

"Goodbye, Harry," Lisa said softly.

XoX

Harry appeared within the alley that he had designated as his apparition point with nary a crack to signify his sudden arrival. He looked around to see no one was near him and shrunk his trunk, stashing with the inner left pocket of his jacket. Walking out of the alley, he wove his way through the crowd of people who were walking to their destinations.

He looked at his watch; it read 10:50. The train left at 11:00, so he would have to hurry if he wanted to make it.

Normally he would have gotten a seat on the Hogwarts Express by now, but since he had been with Lisa and her family, he had made allowances and stayed until he had to leave for Lisa's sake.

He walked towards the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Walking at the large brick wall, Harry only had a split second to realize something was wrong, right before he crashed into it. Thankfully, he hadn't been going at it in a run, which he had seen some kids do. If he had, Harry would have likely ended up breaking his nose or something.



The people around looked at Harry oddly, but he ignored them and furrowed his brow in thought. Pressing his hands against the wall, he reached out with his magic and his frown grew even more pronounced.

When he had passed the barrier at other times, Harry could feel the magic that separated Platform nine and three-quarters from the muggle world. It was much like feeling static electricity tickling the back of your neck. Now, however, he couldn't feel anything. It was as if someone had turned the barrier off, or sucked out all of the magic.

"Well, this is a problem," Harry mumbled to himself. What was he going to do now? And why was the barrier not working? As these thoughts passed through his head, Harry realized that he didn't have time to think about the hows and whys right now. Looking at his watch he saw that it read 11:05. the Hogwarts Express would have left by now.

Leaning against the wall Harry's mind went over the dilemma in his head, moving through possible solutions that he had to get to Hogwarts. He had sent Hedwig on ahead, not wanting her to be cooped up in the compartment with all of his friends. This meant he couldn't send a message to professor McGonagall. He could try apparating to Hogsmeade, but there was a possibility of the village's inhabitants spotting him, and apparating was illegal unless you were seventeen and had received a permit from the Ministry.

That, and he was not confident in his abilities to apparate that far. After having his magic drained from apparating him and Angeline after he had rescued her, Harry had realized that apparition wasn't just about visualization. It was about power. The farther he wanted to go, the more power he would have to put into his apparition. Hogwarts was in Scotland, he was in London, and the farthest Harry had apparated was from the Flamel estate to Paris, which was a surprisingly short distance from each other. He could of course, try multiple apparitions, but that required that he visualize the areas in between, and he had not gotten a good enough look from inside the Hogwarts Express to be capable of properly visualizing the area in his mind.

That left only a few options; he could wait. There was a good possibility that when Harry didn't show up for the Start of Term feast, people would get curious and someone would come to get him. But that would also take a long time, the train itself wouldn't get to Hogwarts until late evening, and Harry had no intention of waiting at Kings Cross that long.

After a few seconds' thought, Harry came up with a plan to get to Hogwarts. Walking back out of the station, Harry made his way to an abandoned alley. Taking out his mother's wand, he immediately cast a strong muggle repellent ward, and muggle-notice-me-not, wincing a bit as he felt his magic drain. While he could cast most of the spells he had read about, Harry had realized early on that some pushed him to his limit right now. Warding charms in particular were hard and required more magic than most second or even third years students had.

Once done he took his trunk out and set it on the ground, tapping it twice with his wand and stepping back as it regrew to its normal size. He opened the trunk to its fourth compartment and pulled out his invisibility cloak and nimbus two thousand. Once he re-shrunk the trunk and placed it back in his jacket, Harry straddled the seat of his broom and threw the invisibility cloak over himself. As added security, he cast another muggle-notice-me-not charm, along with a disillusionment charm before lifting himself in the air.

"Point me, Hogwarts," Harry muttered, holding out his mother's wand. It vibrated and lifted off his hand before pointing towards the North. Sighing Harry placed the wand back in his ankle holster and pushed his broom forward.

It took around fifteen minutes before he caught sight of the tracks that the Hogwarts Express used, and another thirty before he caught sight of the large scarlet steam engine itself. Moving up alongside the large train, Harry looked into the compartments, looking for a friendly face. When he saw some of the people he hung out with Harry removed his cloak, keeping the sticking charm he had attached to it so that it wouldn't fly away as he dispelled the disillusionment charm as well.

He grinned at the person who was gawking at him in startled bewilderment and pointed to the window. He mouthed, "Can you open the window for me!"

XoX

Lisa Turpin sighed as she looked at her friends, Padma and Terry, as she sat in the compartment they had chosen. For whatever reason Harry wasn't on the train and they had been forced to split into groups since none of them could cast an expansion charm on the compartments. Hermione had tried, but she simply didn't have enough magic to cast the charm.

"I wonder where Harry is?" she mumbled. The others in the room looked at her. Aside from Padma and Terry, the room also had Mandy Brocklehurst, a soft-spoken muggle-born witch with brown hair and kind brown eyes. She was something of a wall-flower, soft-spoken and shy, very little was known about her because of this. The other members was Anthony Goldstein, a slightly irritating pureblood with blond hair and blue eyes, and Micheal Corner, a quiet half-blood with shoulder length brown hair and brown eyes.

"Who knows," said Padma, shrugging as she went back to her book. "We didn't find him in any of the compartments. It's possible he's already at Hogwarts, or maybe he missed the train."

"Not likely," Terry commented idly as he flipped a page of his own book. "Harry strikes me as the type who usually arrives early to everything. I doubt he would have been late to something as important as the train that takes us back to school."

"But what if something held him up?" Padma argued. "Maybe he had some important business and couldn't make it because of that."

Terry shrugged, "that's possible. But Harry lives in the muggle world from what he told us. I don't see what could possibly hold him up there."

"It could be his friend," Lisa pointed out.

"Maybe," Padma said, before sighing. "But what ever the case is, he's not here."

Mandy Brocklehurst let the conversation wash over her with a soft frown on her face. She had not hung out with Harry and his group, having been far too shy to even introduce herself to them.

Sighing she leaned against the wall and looked around the window to watch the land blur by.

She blinked.

She blinked again, then rubbed her eyes just to make sure she wasn't seeing things.

It took a few seconds for her to determine that, no, she was not hallucinating and yes, that was Harry Potter flying alongside the window to her compartment, grinning at her. As her mouth opened in complete shock, Harry pointed to the latch keeping the window closed and mouthed, "Can you open the window for me!" to her.

"It's Harry Potter!" she gasped in surprise, eyes flying wide open as shock, surprise and a myriad of other emotions ran through her in quick succession of each other.

"Harry!" Lisa, Terry and Padma all shouted as they too looked out of the window, along with the other two occupants.

"It is Harry!" Terry shouted, "what the bloody hell is he doing!"

"Who cares?" said Lisa, an annoyed look on her face. "Let's open the window!" Being the closest to the latch Mandy, was the one who undid it while Padma and Lisa rushed over and pushed the window open.

That was all Harry needed as he moved in close, close enough to touch the train with his knee. He took one hand off of his broom and grabbed onto the window sill. With a grunt and a heave, he hauled himself through the window, pulling the broom in with him.

"Ah!" Harry sighed as he shook his wind swept hair. He looked at all the gaping people in the compartment and grinned. "Thanks for helping me out there, I was afraid I would have to fly all the way to Hogwarts!"

That seemed to be the cue everyone was waiting as a general shout of "Harry!" went up from his friends and the three others he didn't know as well.

"What were you thinking, Harry!" asked Lisa, shouting as she got in front of him and glared.

"Um... what do you mean?" asked Harry, his tone expressing his confusion as he wondered what she was talking about.

"I mean what were you thinking! Flying to Hogwarts on a broom! Jumping into our compartment through the window! Do you know how dangerous that was! You could have been hurt!"

"Yeah," Harry said slowly, nodding his head. "But I wasn't, so it's all good."

"All good!" Padma said, deciding to get into the 'lets berate Harry Potter' spirit now that she was getting over her shock of seeing someone fly into the Hogwarts Express via the window. "You could have been killed!"

"Well, why don't we just consider this the start of my next dangerous Hogwarts adventure," Harry commented lightly. However, his joke seemed to be lost on the two girls who just continued to glare at him. Sighing, he said, "look, I'm sorry I worried you, but there wasn't much else I could do."

"What do you mean?" asked Terry, frowning at him with a contemplative expression.

"Why don't we wait for the explanations until we can get everyone else, hmm?" said Harry. "I really don't want to have to explain this several times."

Padma and Lisa looked at each other before nodding. They turned back to Harry and Lisa said, "that's fine, so long as you explain yourself soon."

"Great!" Harry said, inwardly relieved that the two weren't glaring at him anymore. He was beginning to believe that the scary death glare ability was something all females had. He did his best to hold in a shudder as he said, "Why don't we go and find one of the compartments with our other friends."

"What about our trunks?" asked Terry, pointing to the trunks that were being held in the alcove above their heads.

"Do you want me to float them with us?" asked Harry, looking at the trunks. "I can do that, though I don't think it will matter. Your trunks have your name on it so its not like they'll get confused about whose is whose."

"I suppose your right."

"Right, so lets head out," Harry said, getting his three friends to walk out of the compartment. Before stepping out himself Harry looked back and smiled at the three left. "It was very nice seeing you three again, Mandy, Anthony, Micheal. If you want, all three of you are welcome to join our group whenever you feel like it." With that said he left the three to slowly get over their shock.

"Man," Micheal sighed as he looked at the now closed door. "That was so cool."

"Hmph," Anthony huffed, crossing his arms over his chest. "I could have done that if I wanted to."

"I'm sure," Micheal said dryly.

Mandy just looked back out of the window, her face still slightly red from when Harry had smiled at her. "Harry Potter," she mused softly.

XoX

The scowl that had been on Tracey's face hadn't left since she got on the Hogwarts express and found out that Harry was not there. "Where is he?" she grumbled angrily.

"Who knows," Blaise said, already knowing who she was referring to. She had been complaining about Harry not being on the train ever since they had gotten on the Hogwarts Express. "He might have missed it. Or he could already be at Hogwarts. With Harry, you can never truly know what's going on unless he decides to explain himself. And since he isn't here, there's no way he can do that."

"I hope nothing happened to him," Daphne said, a rare expression of concern on her face.

"I'm sure he's fine," Blaise said. "If he can fight off a dark lord and make it out okay, then something like missing the train to school won't keep him down."

"Face off against a dark lord or not, when I see him again I'm going to hex him for worrying me," Tracey grumbled. Blaise just chuckled a little at the girl, who heard the noise and gave him a fierce looking scowl.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here," an obnoxious voice spoke up as the compartment door opened. The three Slytherin's looked up at the familiar and annoying voice and all three gained simultaneous scowls.

"What do you want Malfoy?" asked Tracey, her voice snappish and annoyed.

"Looks like someone is grouchy today," Malfoy said as Crabbe and Goyle moved up on either side of him. Meanwhile Millicent, Nott and Parkinson were right behind the trio, doing their best to look intimidating.

Malfoy looked around the compartment and smiled, "so it's true then, Potter isn't on the train. How rich. I knew that fool wouldn't amount to anything, he probably ran away knowing that he couldn't match the power of a pureblood."

"Shut up Malfoy!" Tracey snapped. She gave the blond child the most hateful glare she could muster, it was surprisingly easy, what with her being upset and worried about Harry. The fact that she hated Malfoy more than just about anyone else in the world only added fuel to her fire.

"I would watch your words if I were you half-blood!" Malfoy said with a sneer. When Tracey just glared back at him, he turned to look at the other two occupants; Blaise was looking at the group with slightly narrowed eyes, while Daphne had her icy gaze locked on the blond. It was a look that could likely freeze hell over.

Malfoy ignored the shiver he felt from the blond girl's gaze as he sneered at the group. "We already told these two blood traitors Zabini, but for your own benefit I'll give you the same warning. Hanging out with mudbloods and their ilk is unbecoming of a

Slytherin. I would suggest you three stop spending your time around those who are beneath you. Things are going to be different at Hogwarts this year; we won't tolerate those who betray our house."

"And if we decide not to listen to you?" asked Tracey, her annoyance at Harry not being on the train combined with the increasing irritation caused by Malfoy and the other Death Eater Children's presence making her less frightened of them than she normally would be without Harry there.

"Then we'll have to make you," Malfoy said, his eyes narrowed dangerously. Beside him Crabbe and Goyle both cracked their knuckles, opting not to go for their wands since they likely didn't even know what to do with them. Nott and Parkinson both got their wands out in case the others put up a fight, while Millicent did the same as Crabbe and Goyle since she wasn't very good with a wand.

"Go to hell Malfoy," Tracey said. Blaise and Daphne both discreetly brought out their wands.

"So be it," Malfoy sneered. "Crabbe! Goyle! I think these three blood traitors need to be taught what happens when they don't fall in line."

Crabbe quickly went over to Blaise who got his wand out and shouted, "Locomotor Mortis!" the Leg-locker jinx hit Crabbe, causing him to trip up just as he started moving on Blaise. Unfortunately for Blaise this caused the large boy to crash right into him, sending him back onto his seat and knocking his wand out of his hand.

Goyle meanwhile went for Tracey, whose eyes widened as she fumbled for her wand. He was just about to get to her when Daphne shouted, "Tracey move!" which the brunette did, giving Daphne a clear shot at Goyle with her wand. She flicked it at him and cast a hex at the large Gorilla like boy.

Goyle stopped as the hex hit him. His nose enlarged as his bogey's came flying out, growing wings before they began attacking him. As Goyle began to make an attempt at fighting off the bogey's, Millicent used to distraction casting the curse had caused to hit Daphne across the face. The blond Slytherin girl fell back with a shout of pain.



Malfoy smirked as he watched the three struggle against his the three brutish students. However as his thoughts on how this lesson would teach these three not to spend time with people from the lesser houses, a shout of "Depulso!" came from the left outside of the compartment.

Malfoy twirled around and was just in time to see Nott and Parkinson get sent flying backwards, where they crashed into the ground. As the two attempted to stand up, two red blasts of light smashed into them, making them crumple to the ground.

A second later, none other than Harry Potter ran into the compartment. The raven haired youth took a split second look around the room, a scowl on his face, before his wand flashed. Three red bolts of energy flew from his wand, crashing into Crabbe, Goyle and Millicent. Another flick and all three were yanked off the other three Slytherin students.

Malfoy's eyes widened before he went for his wand. However, he didn't even get the chance to draw as he was yanked off the ground and slammed into a wall.

"I don't take it particularly well when I see people bullying others," Harry said, his voice a soft hiss that sounded almost snake like. The scion of the Malfoy family shivered at the frightening tone; it was a sibilant hiss that would have made the Dark Lord proud. "I tend to get especially violent when I see people ganging up on and hurting my friends."

Malfoy paled when he looked into those eyes, cold green orbs that looked like they held a storm behind them. They were eyes that promised pain to those who they saw as an enemy.

And Malfoy was most definitely an enemy.

Harry spun about, taking Malfoy with him and smashing the blond boy's face into another wall. There was a crack as blood spurted from the boy's now broken nose. Malfoy's whimpers were cut off when Harry pressed his wand against the boy's neck, pushing on it harshly.

Leaning in, Harry whispered, "I believe the last time you messed with one of my friends I told you I would not only humiliate you but it

would be painful. Well, guess what? That was the only warning you were going to receive!"

Before Malfoy knew what was happening, Harry tossed the blond boy out of the compartment, a flick of his wand and all the blond boys clothing except for his underwear vanished. Several more flicks and those of all Malfoys friends were vanished as well, then Crabbe, Goyle and Millicent were sent flying on top of Malfoy who squealed in pain and had tears in his eyes.

A second later, Harry cast the enervate charm on the five unconscious second years. "I suggest you five leave," he said so coldly that even Harry's friends shivered. Pointing his wand at the group of now revived students, he continued, "If I catch you harassing my friends again, I'll do much worse than vanish your clothes."

At this, Parkinson and Millicent looked at themselves and shrieked – well, Parkinson shrieked. With Millicent, it sounded more like the moan of a dying cow. By this time, many of the other students were looking out of their compartments as the group all took off, laughing at the group of near-naked students.

XoX

Harry sighed as he watched Malfoy and his friends leave. He had already come to the conclusion that the boy wouldn't be able to leave well enough alone this year. The ponce simply didn't have the brain capacity to make intelligent decisions like avoiding those more powerful than him. The boy would learn eventually though, whether by Harry himself or someone else.

Shaking the thoughts of hurting Malfoy away, he looked behind him at the rest of his friends, those he had found before running across Malfoy and his goons. "Hold on out here for a moment while I help them and expand the compartment."

"Sure thing, Harry," Neville said while the rest of the group just nodded.

Harry entered the compartment to see his three Slytherin friends looking at him in shock. He took quick stock of their injuries: Tracey looked to be uninjured, but Blaise had several bruises on his face

from where Crabbe had hit him. Likewise, Daphne had a large and angry looking bruise on her left cheek and another bruise around her throat.

"H-Harry?" asked Tracey in a slight stutter, her eyes going wide as if she couldn't quite believe he was there.

"Hey Trace," Harry said with a smile. "Sorry I'm late; we'll talk in a moment. Hannah!" he called, getting the blond Hufflepuff to bound up to him.

"Yes Harry?" she asked.

"Your mum is a nurse at Saint Mungos, right?" he asked, getting a confused nod from the blond. "Then I can assume you know healing charms?"

"Just the basic ones," Hannah said nervously, "I haven't done much with them since we can't practice at home."

"That's fine, can you take care of Blaise's bruises?"

Hannah looked over at Blaise before nodding, "it doesn't look too hard." She brought out her wand and moved over to the dark-skinned boy. "Hold still, Blaise," she said as she began casting a minor healing charm.

Meanwhile, Harry went over to Daphne and knelt down. "Harry?" she whispered, tears staining her cheeks as she held a hand to the bruise.

"You okay?" he asked softly. Daphne sniffed a bit, but nodded. That she was actually showing her pain meant the bruise likely hurt more than its small size suggested. He was forced to immediately quell the anger he felt – lest he decided to go after Malfoy again – in order to get to the task at hand.

"Let me see your bruise," Harry gently took her hand and pulled it away from her cheek. The blond's entire left cheek was black and swollen, showing just how hard Millicent hit. The large Slytherin had likely put all her weight into it too.

"Hold still for a moment," Harry muttered as he brought up his wand and cast a basic healing charm. He held the charm, watching as the black slowly disappeared. It did nothing for the swelling, and it was likely still painful, but at least it looked better. "How does it feel?" he asked when he finished.

"It still hurts," she whispered. Harry nodded as he reached into his potions belt. It took a moment before he found the right potion. It was in a muggle container since he felt it was more efficient then holding it in a vial. He unscrewed the cap and dabbed his fingers in the white, cream-like liquid.

"It's a healing paste," Harry told Daphne at seeing her slightly confused expression. She blinked for a second before nodding. Harry lightly placed his hand on her face, and she hissed in slight pain before the paste took effect. The swelling soon went down, and soon it was gone entirely. "How do you feel now?" he asked as he placed the lid back on and put the jar back in its previous spot.

"Better," she said. A smile worked its way on her face as she leaned in and gave him a hug. "Thank you, Harry," she brought her face over and placed a light kiss on his cheek, moving back with just a small blush on her face to show she was embarrassed by her show of affection.

"You're welcome," Harry coughed into his hand, trying to ignore the heat on his own cheeks that the kiss had caused.

Damn that Angeline and her flirtatious ways!

In an effort not to let on just how flustered that kiss on the cheek truly made him, Harry looked over at Blaise and Hannah to see she was still working, since their dark-skinned friend had a lot more bruises. "Need help, Han?" he asked.

"No," Hannah said, biting her lower lip in concentration as she healed the last mark. "I've got it, thanks though."

"No problem, now -"

"Harry!" Harry turned around in time catch Tracey who had more or less thrown herself at him. He stumbled slightly as he held onto her,

then was forced to turn his head when – just as quickly as she hugged him – she backed up and smacked him across the face.

Bringing a hand up to his face, Harry blinked dumbly at Tracey for a second. "What was that for?" he asked.

"That was for not being here on time and making me worry," Tracey said. She looked at him for a second before looking away, "When I didn't see you on the train, I was afraid something had happened to you." Before he had a chance to say anything, Tracey's arms moved around him in another hug.

"I'm sorry," Harry said, returning the hug. He had absently thought about how he was giving hugs a lot recently. At first, he had wondered if it was just Lisa who enjoyed physical signs of affection so much, but considering how many of the girls in his circle of friends liked hugging, he had to amend that theory. Though it did make him wonder why they enjoyed showing affection in such a manner.

He also did his best to ignore the memories of his time with Tracey during the summer that cropped up from this hug. Yes, he was really beginning to hate Angeline for corrupting his mind so much.

"It's alright," she mumbled as she stepped away. She blushed a bit as she looked at the ground, "sorry for hitting you."

"Don't worry about it," Harry said with a sigh. "You weren't the only one to hit me."

Tracey blinked at that statement. "I wasn't?"

"Nope."

"Then who else did?"

"I did," Hannah admitted with a sheepish looking grin. Harry cast her a mild glare that held no real malice to it, though it was effective in making her blush a bit in embarrassment.

"Okay, so, now that everyone's alright and the ponce is gone for the moment, why don't we get this compartment fitted." Harry waved his wand around the room, and his friends watched as the room began

to grow, expanding exponentially in size. When it was large enough to fit ten people, all of those who had been waiting outside moved in.

Harry found himself being pulled into a seat by Tracey as she sat down, sitting on her left. Before anyone else could sit on Harry's right, Hannah pounced on it, almost literally, taking the spot for herself while Susan sat down next to her blond friend with a disappointed frown. Daphne chose to sit on Tracey's other side, while Blaise stayed where he was. The other interspersed themselves on the seats and when everyone was comfortable Padma turned her eyes on Harry.

"Alright Harry," she started, "we've been patient. Now, could you please explain just why we caught you flying on your broom alongside the Hogwarts Express?"

"WHAT!" came the shout of several others.

"How could you do something so dangerous, Harry!"

"Did you really do that?"

"Why would you do something like that?"

"Alright, alright!" Harry shouted, trying to raise his voice above the cacophony of questions his friends were throwing at him. "Calm down! I can't tell you anything if you won't even let me talk." It took a few minutes, but everyone seemed to settle down after that, all of them looking pointedly at him, demanding an explanation.

"Okay, so I had just gotten to Kings Cross and was going to walk through the barrier when, when I couldn't."

"What do you mean 'couldn't'?" asked Neville with a frown of concentration on his face.

"That's just what I mean," Harry said. "The magic that was behind the barrier wasn't there. It was like someone had turned it off."

"But that barrier is always open," Hermione argued. "It says so in Hogwarts, a History."

"I'm not going to argue with you Hermione," Harry said. "I've read the book as well. However, the magic behind the barrier was gone, I almost smashed my face against the wall like what I did with Malfoy a few minutes ago." Most of those in the room got a chuckle over the reminder of how Harry had handled the ferrety blond.

Blaise frowned once he came down from his mirth. "If what you say is true, someone really doesn't want you to go back to Hogwarts. What with all that's happened this summer."

"What happened this summer?" asked Hermione.

"Remember how it took about two months to respond to your letters?" asked Harry. When Hermione nodded, he continued, "Well that's because I had a House Elf named Dobby stealing my mail"

"Dobby?" asked Daphne, a small frown on her face.

"Have you heard of him, Daph?" asked Harry, leaning over so he could look at the blond.

"It does sound familiar..." Daphne shook her head. "I've heard the name before but I can't remember where." Harry sighed when he heard that, he had been hoping she would know who Dobby belonged to so that he would be able to know who he needed to watch. It looked like he would just have to keep an eye on everyone.

"Why would a house elf steal your mail?" asked Hermione.

"I don't know," Harry gave a helpless shrug. "Unfortunately he didn't say, and I couldn't get him to tell me who he belonged to."

"I bet it was Malfoy," Tracey said, a scowl back on her face. "He was pretty excited that you weren't here. I bet he did it so that he could gloat."

"Doubtful," Daphne said. When everyone looked at her she smiled grimly, "he doesn't have the intelligence to plan that far ahead."

Everyone laughed again at the insult to the Malfoy scion. "It could have been his father though," Susan pointed out softly. "We all know that while Draco isn't that smart -"

"You mean he's about as intelligent as a Slug, and just as slimy too," Hannah said, interrupting her long-time friend.

Susan blushed but didn't comment on Hannah's insult as she continued. "However, his father doesn't seem to be lacking in that department."

"Why do you say that?" asked Harry.

"My Auntie complains about him a lot," Susan said with a shrug of her shoulders. "She's been trying to get him jailed for years, but has never been able to get any evidence. When ever she tried to get a warrant to search his home, Lucius would use one of the many loopholes and appeal the the Wizengamot."

"So he's slippery," murmured Harry, going into thought.

"Very," Susan agreed.

"Whatever, enough talk about this," Padma said. "Why don't you tell us about your summer, Harry? Your letters didn't say much in that regard." The rest of the time on the train was spent sharing tales of what everyone did during the summer.

XoX

"So how are we going to do this?" asked Hannah. After disembarking from the train, Harry and his group of friends had walked over to the carriages, and were now trying to decide how they should split up.

"I was thinking we should mix houses," said Harry, bringing attention to him. He saw the curious looks of his friends and shrugged. "We should have one Gryffindor, one Ravenclaw, one Slytherin and one Hufflepuff in each carriage. Or at least as mixed as possible.

"To show a unified front?" asked Daphne, her brow furrowed slightly in thought.

"Something like that."

"I get to sit with Harry," Hannah said before anyone else had the chance to make a statement.



"Uh uh," said Tracey, "you sat next to Harry on the Hogwarts Express. Let someone else get a chance to sit with him."

"Didn't you all sit with me?" asked Harry. "And why is it so important to sit with me?" Tracey and Hannah just looked at him like he was stupid for a moment before they went back to their discussion.

"Fine," Hannah said, "in that case, Susan can sit with Harry?"

"M-me?" squeaked Susan, blushing a bit as she looked over at Harry.

"Yes you," Hannah said, rolling her eyes at the way her friend snuck glances over at the boy in question. She grinned suddenly as she leaned into her red haired friend. "You want to sit next to him right?"

"W-well," stuttered Susan.

"So it's settled, Susan will get to sit with Harry, along with..." Tracey looked at the others in their group and pointed at the people she chose, naming each as she did so. "Daphne, and Padma, you two will get to sit with Harry as well."

"I'm fine with that," Padma said with a grin. Daphne just shared a glance with Harry and smiled.

"I still don't see what the big deal is," said Harry, looking between the girls in confusion. He looked over at Blaise and Neville who looked just as bewildered as he did. Leaning over to the two, he whispered, "do either of you feel like a secret conversation just took place that you don't have a clue about?"

Neville nodded while Blaise gave a mild snort. "I live with Christine and my mum. I always feel like that."

The carriage groups decided, the ten Hogwarts students walked into their carriages. Blaise, Hermione and Lisa in one; Neville, Terry and Hannah in another; while Harry went with Susan, Daphne and Padma. Harry ended up sitting next to Susan, whose face was beginning to look like her hair. Daphne and Padma shared a look when they noticed the poor girls facial color.

Harry leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes for a moment as he let his mind wander. Another year would be starting soon, and once classes settled he would begin working on his alchemy. He knew that even a year's worth of work wouldn't be enough to take him to a very high level of alchemy, learning the beginning stages were easy, all it required was memorization and learning the basic abilities of Transmutation. Deconstructing and reconstructing materials at the atomic level to create something new, in a way it was a lot like transfiguration, except that transfiguration was only temporary and didn't change the atomic structure of the object you were changing. Alchemy did, and it was almost unlimited in its application.

This was what made it so hard, right now all Harry could do was reconstruct and deconstruct basic materials and repair items. To become a journeyman, the next level of alchemy he had to be capable of coming up with his own transmutation circles by using the symbols and knowledge of the periodic table he had learned with Nicolas Flamel. Unlike his time with the famous alchemist, this would require a lot of trial and error.

Then there was the fact that he would need to find some way to determine how much magic he had, and how much he wasted when casting a spell. Ever since he had discovered the floo used his own magic as its fuel source, he had been wondering about that. Harry knew if he didn't discover the size of his reserves vs. the amount he used for magic, it would drive him mad.

He also had to come up with a new workout routine; after coming home for the summer, he had been disappointed to realize that during his time at Hogwarts he had gotten weaker, more sluggish. He didn't want that to happen this year, especially now that he knew Voldemort was still alive and would likely be after him. That meant he had to step up his game, come up with new ways of exercise and training his muscles. Maybe he could even convince his friends to work out with him, or at least the guys since he doubted the girls would enjoy sweating.

Once school started, he would come up with a schedule for when he would work on his alchemy and his floo project, when he would practice his spells, hang out with his friends and practice Quidditch.

"Hey Harry," Padma said, bringing Harry's attention to her.

"Yes, Padma?" he asked.

"I was just wondering, why can't you use the expansion charm to make the carriages bigger so all of us could fit?"

Harry tilted his head to the side for a moment as he contemplated his answer. "Do you know how the expansion charm works?" he asked, getting Padma to shake her head no. "The Expansion charm is done by pushing your magic out in all directions and sending it against the surface of which ever room you are in, then willing the walls, floor and ceiling to expand. What this does is infuse your magic into the walls and makes it grow bigger, not only does it require a lot of magic to do..."

"But it requires an enclosed space to do it!" exclaimed Padma, finishing the sentence for Harry. "And because this carriage isn't 100% enclosed thanks to the windows not having glass on them, the spell can't be used. I never thought of how the spell would work."

"Most don't," Harry agreed. "In fact, most witches and wizards just use these spells without ever knowing how they work."

"Sounds dangerous," Susan said with a frown.

Harry turned to the red head and shrugged, "not really, the reason spells were created was so that they didn't have to think about how their magic worked. Spells are created by using wand movements and incantations, which allows our wands to pull the magic within us without us actually having to do much. For example," Harry pulled out a galleon from his pouch and his wand, with a swish and flick he cast, "Wingardium Leviosa. If you were to cast the levitation charm, you could just use the incantation with the standard flick and swish and the spell would work just fine, so long as the you got the pronouncement and wand movement perfectly, the visualization makes it easier but is not necessary for spell casting."

"So theoretically someone could cast wandlessly right?" asked Padma.

"No," Harry shook his head. "Wandless magic is not spell-casting, spells are cast with a wand, Wandless magic is the direct application of power, taking ones magic and bending it to the will of the user, it

requires an intimate knowledge of your own magic to use and is not actually a spell."

"But doesn't Dumbledore use wandless magic?" asked Daphne, "I remember seeing him light a candle without a wand once?"

"Yes he does, and Dumbledore has had over 130 years to get in touch with his magic," said Harry.

"Can you use wandless magic?"

Harry gave a mysterious smile at the question. "Maybe."

Daphne pouted at not being given a real answer while Padma and Susan giggled. The rest of the carriages went on with the three discussing what they thought the coming year would be like, before disembarking with the rest of the students.

Meeting up with their friends once again, Harry and the others moved into the Great Hall and separated into their house. Since it was the Start-of-Term feast, they were not allowed to sit outside of their houses, a tradition since the new students were going to be sorted and it was only proper that you knew who was going to be your senior in your house.

Harry, Neville, and Hermione quickly found their seats. Just as they were sitting down however, the Weasley twins quickly found them. "Ah! Harrikins, so good to see you," Fred said, scooting Hermione over so he could sit next to Harry. On the other side, George did the same.

"I hope you're ready for Quidditch, Harry," George added. He then nodded to the other two, "Neville, Hermione, I hope you two had a good summer."

"It was fine, thanks," Hermione sniffed, she still wasn't too keen on the pair of trouble makers, mainly because of all the trouble they gave the professors.

"It was alright," Neville added.

"Good, good, now Harrikins, I hope you're ready for Quidditch this year," said Fred.

"Yes, we need you in tip-top shape," added George.

"Can't have you go fighting dark lords this time."

"It would be a right shame if you got yourself injured before the last game."

"How did you find out about last year?" asked Harry, interrupting the pair.

"Rumors abound, dear Harrikins," said Fred.

George nodded emphatically. "Yes, everyone knew something happened, just not quite what."

"However, for ones such as us, cutting through the sludge and getting the truth is easy."

"When you know as many secrets about Hogwarts as we do."

"Speaking of secrets," George leaned in to whisper conspiratorially. "That prank you pulled on Malfoy last year was brilliant."

"Indeed," said Fred, copying his brother. "We were rather impressed."

"So impressed in fact."

"That we have decided to include you in some of our pranking."

"Yes, we plan to teach you our ways."

"Think of it as us making you our apprentice."

"I don't know..." Harry said, looking at the two with a critical eye. "My prank was pretty good, and I have yet to see you two pull off anything that extravagant. Perhaps I should be the one apprenticing you two." The two pulled back and looked at each other.

"Did you hear what he said, dear brother o' mine?"

"I did indeed Fred."

"He thinks he's better than us."

"Indeed, that is what he said."

"Though he does have a point."

"We haven't done anything big for a while."

"Perhaps we should show him just how good we are."

"Yes, I believe he would change his mind in a heartbeat if he saw us at work."

Fred and George both looked at Harry before saying at the same time, "Challenge accepted!"

After exchanging parting pleasantries and a promise to show Harry just how good they were at pranking, the Weasley twins left, allowing Neville and Hermione their seats back.

"What were you thinking Harry?" asked Hermione in a quiet hiss. "Getting those two to make a challenge like that. Now the whole school will fall apart!"

"I think it might be funny," said Harry. Truthfully, he had other reasons for what he had done, reasons that would prove to be beneficial for him. But he wasn't keen on letting anyone know about those reasons just yet. "Besides, we all know who their target will likely be."

"Snape," said Neville. Both looked over at the chubby boy and shuddered when they saw the most evil grin on his face, it was so out of place on the boy that it looked even more demented and dark than normal.

"Probably," said Harry.

"Still, pranking, especially pranking teachers, is against the rules!"

"Well, they'll be the ones breaking them, not us," said Harry. Hermione just huffed and crossed her arms, unable to think of anything to say to dispute him.

The doors to the Great Hall soon opened and Harry watched as the new first year students walked in and stood in line the same way they had during their first year. All of them looked nervous, which was to be expected. He had learned during the school year that what house you went to not only more or less demanded you act a certain way, but that some students were actually expected to be in a certain house. This was mainly consistent with the pureblood families.

The so-called light-sided and neutral families weren't that picky, but there were certain traditions, like there hadn't been a Weasley that was not in Gryffindor since 1563 (according to George). However, the dark-side families were a lot more strict at where their children went. Most pretty much demanded that their children get placed in Slytherin, it was as much about honor for them as it was blood purity. They did not want their children soiling themselves with those they considered "lesser students". It was one of the things Harry hoped to change.

Like last time the sorting hat was placed on the stool, and its mouth parted in song:

In times of old when I was new  
And Hogwarts barely started  
The Founders of our noble school  
Thought never to be parted:  
United by a common goal,  
They had the selfsame yearning  
To make the world's best magic school  
And pass along their learning.  
"Together we will build and teach!"  
The Four good friends decided  
And never did they dream that they  
Might someday be divided,  
For were there such friends anywhere  
As Slytherin and Gryffindor?  
Unless it was the second pair  
Of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw?  
So how could it have gone so wrong?  
How could such friendships fail?  
Why, I was there and so can tell  
The whole sad, sorry tale.

Said Slytherin, "We'll teach just those  
Whose ancestry is purest."  
Said Ravenclaw, "We'll teach those whose  
Intelligence is surest."  
Said Gryffindor, "We'll teach all those  
With brave deeds to their name,"  
Said Hufflepuff, "I'll teach the lot,  
And treat them just the same."  
These differences caused little strife  
When first they came to light,  
For each of the four founders had  
A House in which they might  
Take only those they wanted, so,  
For instance, Slytherin  
Took only pure-blood wizards  
Of great cunning, just like him,  
And only those of sharpest mind  
Were taught by Ravenclaw  
While the bravest and the boldest  
Went to daring Gryffindor,  
Good Hufflepuff, she took the rest,  
And taught them all she knew,  
Thus the Houses and their founders  
Retained friendships firm and true.  
So Hogwarts worked in harmony  
For several happy years,  
But the discord crept among us  
Feeding on our faults and fears.  
The Houses that, like pillars four,  
Had once held up our school,  
Now turned upon each other and,  
Divided, sought to rule.  
And for a while it seemed the school  
Must meet an early end,  
What with dueling and with fighting  
And the clash of friend on friend  
And at last there came a morning  
When old Slytherin departed  
And though the fighting then died out  
He left us quite downhearted.  
And never since the founders four  
Were whittled down to three  
Have the Houses been united



And they once were meant to be.  
And now the Sorting Hat is here  
And you all know the score:  
I sort you into Houses  
Because that is what I'm for,  
But this year I'll go further,  
Listen closely to my song:  
Though condemned I am to split you  
Still I worry that it's wrong,  
Though I must fulfill my duty  
And must quarter every year  
Still I wonder whether sorting  
May not bring the end I fear.  
Oh, know the perils, read the signs,  
The warning history shows,  
For our Hogwarts is in danger  
From external, deadly foes  
And we must unite inside her  
Or we'll crumble from within  
I have told you, I have warned you..  
Let the sorting now begin

Harry clapped with the rest of the students before Professor McGonagall, acting in her role as Headmistress, began the sorting. He only paid half-attention to the sorting process, he could hear the names called clearly enough, and that was enough for him to remember. He noted that not as many went into Gryffindor this year, they got a kid named Collin Creevey, who, as soon as the boy sat down, spotted Harry and began staring at him. It was a bit creepy, but Harry did his best to ignore the boy.

The other member they got that he took special note of was Ginerva Weasley, the last and apparently only female Weasley (not including their mother). She sat down with the other first years and looked around the table. As soon as she saw Harry her face flushed bright red, surpassing the hue of her hair, and she quickly looked away.

Harry frowned at that but shrugged the girls actions off. He had been getting that response so many times recently that he just didn't care.

Over at the staff table, Dumbledore stood up and held out his arms. "I would like to welcome all of you to another year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our feast, I would like to say a few words..."

XoX

So I think I just made at least 80% of the male populations day with my last A/N, and nearly every female pissed. I would like to apologize to the females, I do understand that harems, especially in society today is considered very degrading. Unless of course you live in a third world country where Polygamy is still accepted... or your a Mormon because I think they still believe in polygamous relationships even if they are not allowed to have them. While I will admit that I am unsure if a harem story can ever be 'tastefully done' simply because of what the act of having a harem implies, I will do my best to ensure that the women are not degraded and stand on equal grounds with Harry in the relationship.

I do admit that I feel people should have seen this coming, however, given just how much interaction Harry has had with the females in his life.

## Chapter 9: The Blond Floozy

XoX

Early the next morning Harry Potter found himself sitting at the Gryffindor table with a pen in his hand and a notebook on the table. It was just after his morning workout and none of his other friends were awake, in fact, Harry was sure that at least three-fourths of the school was still asleep. There were only a few of the older years sitting at any of the tables.

Currently, Harry was trying to decide on what kind of work out schedule he should have. The paper already had several lines of jotted notes on various exercises, including strength and endurance training regimens, obstacle courses, combat training, stretches and speed training. Listed next to each exercise were the various benefits it granted, as well as any negatives it might also hold. He didn't necessarily need it to be written on paper, but, like all people, Harry found that it helped to write things out when coming to a decision on something like this so that he could cross reference everything more easily.

Each one of the exercise routines had their benefits. However, he was being faced with a huge problem, each routine was also limited in what he could actually do while at Hogwarts.

Strength and endurance could only be done through running, swimming, push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups and other natural exercises that didn't require muggle machines and weights. This meant he had to do around twice as many reps to get the same amount of work he would if he went to a gym. The problem with this was Harry was already doing one hundred sets of three for each exercise, having spent so much of his time exercising before coming to the Hogwarts the simple fact was that Harry was in excellent shape. Better shape than muggles twice his age, and in way better shape than nearly all wizards of any age. Only a few wizarding jobs actually required one to be in shape: Curse Breakers, due to their job involving heavy travel and breaking into tombs and such with loads of traps; Aurors, who needed to be capable of fighting dark wizards; Dragon Handlers, just the name should make it obvious why they needed to be in good shape; and Hit-Wizards, who, much like their auror counterparts, are required to be in good shape to fight.

There was also the fact that he would be reaching puberty soon, which would come with it's own problems. Right now he was young, his physical attributes could only grow so much due to the fact that his body was not mass producing the chemicals in his body that helped promote growth, which would only happen once he hit puberty. When it did, his mind and body would experience a significant amount of growth and, given Harry's propensity towards pushing himself to his limits, such a rapid increase would pose a problem to his physical fitness unless he found a way to increase the difficulty of his work outs. It was a conundrum he had yet to solve.

Likewise, obstacle courses required that he actually make a course; not only that, but he needed the land to make a course on. He had no clue where he could make a course, and while he might be able to Transfigure one, he didn't have the magical capacity to make a course as large as he would need, much less the amount of reserves required to make the transfigurations permanent.

Combat training was vastly stunted, practicing by fighting imaginary opponents and running through forms only got one so far. In order to truly improve, Harry had to spar against others, particularly against people who were better then he was. Last year Tonks could give him something of a workout with their magic sparring, but even that didn't help him with his hand-to-hand. Plus, Tonks was no longer here, so he was even out of a dueling partner.

Stretches were fine, that was actually an easy one and something he could do anywhere. It didn't require the use of special equipment and could be done in the sanctity of his common room if needed. It was the same for speed training, all that really required was for Harry to run sprints, though he would still like to vary his exercise with that. Perhaps he should see if he could convince some of the students to join in a game of football...

"Good morning, Harry!"

"Morning Trace," Harry said, turning his head as the brunette sat down next to him. "Daph, Blaise," he greeted as Daphne sat on his right and Blaise took a seat on the other side.

"Good morning Harry," Daphne greeted, her tone and facial expressions were only luke warm as usual when in public. It was

something he had come to expect of Daphne, she never showed her true self to anyone she did not consider a friend, and even then she tended to keep to herself. But Harry knew better, he only had to look at her eyes to see the warmth the blond girl possessed.

Blaise just gave a nod as he started to pile food on his plate, he still didn't look fully awake.

Students were beginning to fill into the Great Hall now. Harry noticed some of the older years from Slytherin and a few Ravenclaws coming in. It didn't take long before the four were joined by others. Hermione and Neville came down first, sitting next to Blaise as they greeted everyone. Next came Hannah and Susan, with the blond greeting everyone enthusiastically and Susan giving a soft hello. The last three to sit at their table was Lisa, Padma and Terry.

As everyone began to eat, Tracey leaned against Harry's shoulder to see what he was working on. The unbidden contact sent a minor jolt through the young raven haired boys body that he ignored thanks to his Occlumency. "What's this?" she asked, looking at the muggle note-pad with unrestrained curiosity.

"Hmm? Oh, I'm trying to come up with a schedule for my work out routine," said Harry. He looked at his notes and frowned. "When I got back to my relatives, my teacher noted that I was weaker this summer than last year. I'm trying to come up with a way to correct that."

"That's right!" Tracey exclaimed, standing up and snapping her fingers. Everyone turned to look at the girl. It took a moment before she realized a lot of people, including those at other tables were staring at her. Blushing Tracey sat down amid quite a bit of snickering. In a more subdued voice she said, "I remember you saying something about knowing muggle fighting, like with your hands and all."

"Yes," Harry said, amused at the girls name for it. "It's called hand-to-hand combat, though it has many other names, depending on the martial arts style used."

"So that's what this is for?"

"Not necessarily," replied Harry, looking back at his notes with a sigh. "It will be beneficial for my combat training, but it also has other benefits; strengthening the body isn't just to help with fighting. A healthier body is one of the many benefits that comes with exercise, people who are healthier also tend to live longer and with less problems like diseases that come from age."

"Maybe for muggles," Blaise said after absently swallowing some of his eggs. "However, most wizards live to be very old, and we rarely ever get diseases, except for magical ailments. Our magic protects us."

"It's that kind of thinking that limits you, Blaise," Harry chided. "If Dumbledore were to have started exercising in his early teens, and continued to do so even to this day, he would likely only look like he was around half his current age."

"And Dumbledore looks ancient," Tracey added with a grin.

"Thank you for that, Trace," said Harry, playfully rolling his eyes at the girls joke. Tracey huffed and he chuckled a bit before continuing. "He would also be much more capable of using his magic, because his body would be able to withstand bringing out his full power. When a wizard gets older, their body begins to become less capable of handling their magic, because the bulk of it is using itself to fight off age and disease. That's why witches and wizards don't get as sick as muggles, and age much more slowly. However, muggles can accomplish the same thing wizards can by keeping their bodies in shape. My master in martial arts is over seventy, but he only looks like he's in his forties."

This was minus the fact that he was short and bald, though Harry would never insult the man out loud, even when he was not there to hear it.

Shaking his head to get rid of the amusing thought, Harry continued, saying, "Imagine what would happen if you combined the two. Theoretically speaking, a wizard would be able to live twice as long if he exercised, because their magic wouldn't need to focus on keeping the body healthy."

All of this was actually just theory that Harry had come up with since the end of first year. After looking at a lot of witches and wizards and

seeing that they still looked relatively thin despite having learned that they don't exercise with only a few exceptions, he had tried to figure out why. From what he could tell during his observations of the way all of the adults had moved when he watched them at King's Cross, none of them worked out, yet their bodies didn't have the excess bulk that most muggles who didn't exercise did.

He had figured it was due to their magic, because magic was essentially the excess energy that was produced by the human body. Even muggles had magic, they just didn't have enough to use it. In that way, Harry assumed magic was life, or the soul as it were. Without magic, nothing would exist.

Because witches and wizards had an excess of magic, their bodies stayed in a general semblance of shape. They remained thin, they didn't really get fat, because their magic and the use of it, increased their metabolism to burn all of the fat and carbohydrates they ate. Some could get fat of course, he remembered the Weasley Matriarch being a fairly large woman, and Crabbe, Goyle and Millicent were all very obese. But Harry just figured some people were worse off than others.

It could have something to do with these people lacking reserves. If a wizard who had more magical power than others aged more slowly, then the reverse could also be true and a witch or wizard who had less magic would age more quickly and would have more problems with their health. By that same token their magic wouldn't be able to keep them in as good a shape as others, because they didn't have enough to support their immune system and other bodily functions.

This led him to his next supporting statement. The more powerful a wizard, the healthier they would be and the longer they would live. Dumbledore, Harry had learned, was coming up on one-hundred-thirteen years old. Most wizards didn't live past the age of eighty or ninety, which any healthy muggle would live to as well thanks to all of the new technological innovations and medical advancements they had made in the past one hundred or so years. Everyone knew that Dumbledore was one of the most powerful wizards in the world, and he was also one of the oldest (minus Nicolas Flamel but Harry didn't count him since his extended life was made from a magical device), therefore the logical conclusion was that the more magic one had, the longer they could live.

Of course, all of this was just theory work at the moment. Harry would still need to do more research in the subject of magic and how it interacted with witches and wizards. He was actually hoping to combine it with his research on pureblood inbreeding so he could hopefully write a book on it that would convince the bigots of the magical world that marriage to muggleborns was actually beneficial towards keeping their magic powerful. Though it would be a long while before he published it.

Blaise looked at Harry critically for a moment before nodding. "You may have a point," he said slowly. Judging by the tone in the boy's voice, it was obvious to Harry that his friend was at least thinking about what he said. Though whether or not he truly decided to believe it was another thing entirely.

"So does that mean you would be interested in joining me tomorrow morning?" asked Harry. He looked at the rest of his friends, "all of you are invited of course."

"No thanks," said Blaise. "I may join in later, but I'll hold off for now."

"Is that where you get off to so early in the morning?" asked Neville.

"Yes," said Harry, "I usually wake up around 4:30 or 5:00 to exercise."

"Than count me out," said Tracey, making a face. "There is no way I could get up so early. I need my beauty sleep, you know?"

"Really?" asked Harry, grinning at the girl. "Because it doesn't seem to be doing anything for you." Tracey's mouth gaped as everyone else at the table guffawed. She blushed bright red, before turning a scathing glare on Harry.

"I'm so going to get you for that, Potter," she growled.

Harry just grinned. "Love you too, Trace."

XoX

Harry, Neville, Hermione, Hannah and Susan all left the castle together after saying goodbye to their other friends. Their first class



of the day was Herbology, which Gryffindor and Hufflepuff shared together. The group of five made their way across the vegetable patch, towards the Greenhouses where all the magical plants were being kept.

As they stopped with the rest of class Harry, Hannah, Hermione and Susan got to listen to Neville as he spoke of all of the things he hoped they would learn in Herbology this year. This was the one class where Neville trumped everyone else, not even Harry was as good in Herbology as he was.

"I really hope we learn about underwater plants," Neville was saying while the other four listened on in amusement. "I was recently reading a book on plants in the Mediterranean and read that there are over four hundred different magical aquatic plants with special properties."

"I don't know if we're going to be doing anything that extensive," said Hannah, before she got a worried look. "At least, I hope not, I don't know if I could memorize that much information."

They reached the greenhouses and a few moments later Professor Sprout came striding across the lawn, a cheery smile on her face. "Alright, let's all get into Greenhouse three to begin your lessons," the squat woman said with her usual cheerful attitude in place.

A gasp was heard from Neville who said. "Is she really going to let us into Greenhouse three?" he looked excited. "last year we were only ever allowed into greenhouse one!" Neville had been disappointed when he had first learned that, he had even gone so far as to try asking Professor Sprout if she would let him help her as an assistant but to no avail, the woman had been quite adamant that no first year would be allowed to enter any greenhouse except for the first one.

Professor Sprout took a large key from and unlocked the door. Even before they entered Harry was able to take in the scent of damp earth fertilizer mingling with the heavy perfume of some giant, umbrella- sized flowers dangling from the ceiling. He and the others quickly went inside and took up there positions; Harry in the center with Susan on one side with Hermione next to her, and Hannah on the other with Neville on her other side.

Professor Sprout made her way behind a trestle bench in the center of the greenhouse. Along the bench were twenty ear-muffs in various colors. "We'll be re-potting Mandrakes today," the Hufflepuff head of house started. "Now, who can tell me the properties of the Mandrake?"

Before anyone else's hand could go up, Neville shot his in air, much to the surprise of many other students since last year it had been either Hermione or Harry who was the first to answer questions. "Mandrakes are a powerful Medicinal plant that's used as the prime ingredient in the Mandrake Restorative Draught, which can cure those who have been petrified. Though it is used in many other antidotes as well," Neville said.

"Excellent job Neville, ten points for Gryffindor," said Professor Sprout. "The Mandrake forms an essential part of most antidotes. It is also, however, dangerous. Who can tell me why? Neville?" she called on the boy who once again had his hand in the air.

"The mandrake cry is fatal to all who hear it," the round faced boy said.

"That's correct! Take another ten points for Gryffindor," Professor Sprout said. "Now, the Mandrakes we have here are still very young." She pointed to a row of deep trays as she spoke, and everyone shuffled forward for a better look. A hundred or so tufty little plants, purplish green in color, were growing there in rows. Harry knew from his reading that when pulled out of the dirt he would see the mandrakes entire form, and that it would begin to cry, which like Neville said was fatal.

"Everyone take a pair of earmuffs," said Professor Sprout.

There was a scramble as everyone tried to seize a pair that wasn't pink and fluffy.

"When I tell you to put them on, make sure your ears are completely covered," said Professor Sprout. "When it is safe to remove them, I will give you the thumbs-up. Right - earmuffs on." Harry snapped the earmuffs over his ears. They shut out sound completely. Professor Sprout put the pink, fluffy pair over her own ears, rolled up the sleeves of her robes, grasped one of the tufty plants firmly, and pulled hard."

Harry nodded when he saw more or less what he expected to see. Instead of roots, a small, muddy, and extremely ugly baby popped out of the earth. The leaves were growing right out of his head. He had pale green, mottled skin, and was clearly bawling at the top of his lungs. Exactly what he expected from the book he read.

While he was not as good as Neville was in Herbology, that didn't mean he was bad at it. Comparatively speaking their grades were the same, both had tied for the highest score in that class. However, Herbology was Neville's passion, whereas Harry was only mildly interested in it.

Professor Sprout took a large plant pot from under the table and plunged the Mandrake into it, burying him in dark, damp compost until only the tufted leaves were visible. Professor Sprout dusted off her hands, gave them all the thumbs-up, and removed her own earmuffs.

"As our Mandrakes are only seedlings, their cries won't kill yet," she said calmly as though she'd just done nothing more exciting than water a begonia. "However, they will knock you out for several hours, and as I'm sure none of you want to miss your first day back, make sure your earmuffs are securely in place while you work. I will attract your attention when it is time to pack up.

"Four to a tray - there is a large supply of pots here - compost in the sacks over there - and be careful of the Venemous Tentacula, it's teething." She gave a sharp slap to a spiky, dark red plant as she spoke, making it draw in the long feelers that had been inching sneakily over her shoulder.

The three Gryffindor and two Hufflepuff mixed groups, Harry ended up with Hanna and a curly haired Hufflepuff boy named Justin Finch-Fletchly and Ernie McMillan; while Neville, Hermione and Susan got into another group.

"Justin, Ernie," Harry greeted the two cordially. He wasn't really friends with either of them; Justin hung out with different crowds, mainly most of the male Hufflepuffs in their year. He was still friendly with them, and Harry had spent some time with the three playing board games in the All-House Common Room.

"Hi Hannah, Harry," Justin greeted brightly. "Have a good summer?"

"Oh it was alright," Hannah said absently. "I went to Italy for two weeks with my family." Hannah's family was not an ancient and noble house, but they were fairly well off. Her father owned several wine vineyards in France and Italy that he went to bi annually to check up on. Hannah had told him that he usually took the whole family with him during the summer as a vacation of sorts. This year had been Italy apparently.

"What about you Harry?" asked Justin, "I heard you actually flew your broom to catch up the Hogwarts Express."

"You heard right," Hannah said dryly, replying before Harry could even get a word in. She then began to regale the two other Hufflepuffs in the second-hand story she had heard from Lisa, Padma, Terry and Harry himself. If nothing else, she was a much better story teller then Harry, who would have simply given Justin the dry facts without any embellishment. Hannah, on the other hand was using wide articulating hand gestures and small pauses to build suspense as she wove the tail of how Harry had flown his broom to catch up to the Hogwarts Express.

"Thank you for that, Hannah," Harry said in a sarcastic tone, though he smiled at her to let her know there were no hard feelings.

Hannah gave him a cheery smile that held a hint of mischievousness to it, "you're welcome."

"Planning on doing anything interesting this year?" asked Justin.

"Actually I am," said Harry. "I'm planning on introducing football to Hogwarts."

"Really?" Justin looked up from their work, looking excited. "That would be brilliant! Perhaps we could even get it to become a club sport like Quidditch!" Harry almost chuckled at the boys enthusiasm. Justin was a muggleborn and as such didn't know much about the wizarding world as a whole. It was no surprise to Harry that he would be so excited about getting the school to sponsor football for the students who were muggleborn or just less talented at flying.

Getting the Mandrakes out of dirt was a hard task, Harry had to admit. While he had read about them, and knew how to get them out, the knowledge gained from a book and that gained from experience were always two very different things.

And it was no less difficult to get them re-potted as well. Just like the Mandrakes didn't want to get pulled out of the earth, they didn't seem to want to get put back in either. Still, with the four of them working together, both tasks were accomplished before the end of class, just a few minutes behind Neville's, Susan's and Hermione's group.

When class ended, Harry said good bye to Susan and Hannah as he, Neville and Hermione made their way to Transfiguration.

Like last year, the class was not that difficult for Harry. The first task they were assigned to do was turn a beetle into a button, something that was rather simple for Harry.

Harry looked at the beetle as it tried to scuttle off his desk. With a wave of his wand, the creature stopped, rippling slightly as it began to change, flattening and losing its legs before turning into a perfectly round button. Sighing, Harry waved his wand again and the button once again became a beetle.

"Excellent job, Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall said, getting Harry to look up at her. She had that rare smile on her face that she reserved for her favorite students, of which Harry was one of them. "Ten points to Gryffindor."

"Actually, I would like to refuse any points given to me," Harry said, shocking the Professor and other students. Smiling at the reaction he got the young wizard continued. "I've been thinking about this for a while now, and have come to the conclusion that the point system, and consequently the house cup are a large reason for the rivalry amongst Houses and one of the reasons that inter-house unity is very hard to achieve. Therefore, I feel that I must decline any points given to me, as I do not wish to continue creating a rift amongst the other houses."

Professor McGonagall bit her lip as she studied the young boy with powerful green eyes. She looked a bit disgruntled at having Harry refuse to accept house points, it was not well known but Minerva

McGonagall could be very competitive when she wanted to be. She had been ecstatic when her house had won the cup last year, and wished to do so again. That Harry had decided not to accept house points meant their big hitter, the one who earned more points than anyone else was gone.

By that same token she couldn't help but feel a burst of pride towards her student. That he was putting Inter-house unity above all else was something worthy of respect, admiration even.

"Very well, Mr. Potter," Minerva sighed. There was really nothing that could be done, she could of course force him to take the points, but that wouldn't really do anything and may annoy Harry. "I shall inform the other teachers, as well as Professor Dumbledore of this and see if we can't get you exempted from the House Point System, if that is your desire. Please accept my congratulations on completing the spell first."

"Thank you, Professor."

"Harry?" Hermione said uncertainly as Professor McGonagall walked away to see if any other students needed help.

"Hmm?"

"Why are you not accepting House points?"

"For the same reason I just stated," Harry replied, somewhat amused by Hermione's confusion. "I'm hoping that by doing this, I can create an example for other students to follow and, with a little luck, maybe we can get rid of the House Cup. I doubt they had this when the school was first formed a thousand years ago, and I feel that it hasn't done much to help heal the rift since the feud between Slytherin and Gryffindor first started."

A brief flicker crossed her eyes, but it was gone before long. Hermione gave a pensive nod, then sat back against her desk, obviously in thought.

Class passed quickly after that. Harry ended up helping Neville get close to finishing the spell, he could make it flat, but had yet to get rid of the legs. Hermione had gotten the spell right about ten minutes after Harry.

The only person who seemed to be having trouble was Ron, who was banging his wand on the table.

Harry and his friends made their way to lunch after class, where they met up with everyone else and chose to sit the Ravenclaw table.

"We have Defense Against the Dark Arts this afternoon," Hannah said excitedly. "Ooh! I can't wait to see what Professor Lockhart has in store for us. I bet we're going to learn some really powerful spells!"

"I bet we're going to learn nothing," Blaise said, just barely withholding a snort of derision, though from the look on his face, it was clear what he thought of learning from Lockhart. "The most we'll probably learn from him is what his favorite shampoo is." Hannah, along with several other witches there gave him an icy glare. Only Daphne didn't seem to care that he had just insulted Lockhart, but then, Harry doubted she would be taken in with the man like the others.

"Did any of you bring brooms this year?" asked Harry.

"No," said Susan, as the several of the others shook their heads. "Should we have?"

"Well, since we're second years we're allowed to," said Harry. "I was hoping to go flying but I didn't want to leave anyone else out. And the school brooms simply aren't all that safe to use."

"We could still all go out if you want to Harry," Susan said, "I don't think any of us will mind."

Harry shook his head. "No, it's fine. Quidditch will start soon, so I'll be flying plenty. I just wanted to see if any one else wanted to come with me."

"I'll bring my broom after Christmas," Tracey said from where she sat on Hannah's left. "I've got a Cleansweep, it's not as good as your Nimbus but it's not bad either." The others who had a broom agreed to bring theirs as well. Lunch ended and the ten decided to head over to the All-House Common Room to hang out.

XoX

Harry sat next to Daphne and Hermione in Defense Class, with Blaise, Neville, and Tracey behind them. He and his friends had been discussing what they hoped to learn from Defense class, though Harry was not going to hold out hope. Thankfully, only Tracey and Hermione actually defended Lockhart when Blaise began to insult the man. When Harry had asked Daphne why she wasn't defending Lockhart she said it was because she knew the man was a fraud, due to several discrepancies she had found in his books.

"In Break with the Banshee Lockhart claims to have gotten rid of the Bandon Banshee in February of nineteen-eighty, yet according to his book he killed the Terror of Minsk in that same month and year," Daphne had told him. "And that's not the only time his books contradict themselves. If you read Wanderings With Werewolves he fought the Wagga Wagga Werewolf in eighty-six, however, if you read Year with the Yeti he was traveling through Norway that very same month. Frankly, I don't know how anyone can believe this garbage when the man's not even consistent with his work."

"You hear that, Tracey?" said Blaise with a satisfied smirk on his face. "Daphne realizes that Lockhart is nothing more than a fraud, why can't you?"

"But that's... it must be some kind of mistake in the book..." Tracey tried. However, this time it was Harry who burst her bubble.

"Daphne's right, aside from the two examples she just gave, there are sixteen more discrepancies and contradicting information in his books. Not only that, but did you read some of the spells he said he used in his fights? I've looked everywhere I could for those spells, even going so far as to take a trip to Borkin and Burkes when I couldn't find the spells in any of the books from the stores I usually go to when I want more reading materials. None of them exist."

"They could just be spells you don't know," Tracey defended. "Or he could have made them himself and just not published them because they were so dangerous..." It was a weak argument and Harry was sure Tracey knew that, judging from her facial expression. It was the kind of look someone had when they knew they were wrong, and were just defending their point out of sheer stubbornness and denial.



"That could be, but I doubt it," Harry said. "In all of Lockhart's books he has ridiculous amounts of information on himself, like his favorite color, when his birthday is and many other useless and trivial pieces of knowledge that have nothing to do with what the books are about. With all of that useless information, don't you think he would have at least written out a warning that the spells he used were dangerous?" Harry then got an idea and smiled as he said, "I suppose I could ask Dumbledore if he knows the spells. A man as powerful and old as him probably knows everything Lockhart does and more. I believe I'll ask him sometime today, and if he doesn't know the spells well, then you just know the golden haired poof is a fraud."

It was just after Harry finished his insult that Gilderoy Lockhart came strolling in. He looked as he always did, his dazzling smile in place and his golden hair shining so much Harry thought his eyes would burn. Lockhart cleared his throat loudly and silence fell. He reached forward, picked up Neville Longbottom's copy of *Travels with Trolls*, and held it up to show his own, winking portrait on the front.

"Me," he said, pointing at it and winking as well. "Gilderoy Lockhart, Order of Merlin, Third Class, Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defense League, and five-time winner of Witch Weekly's Most-Charming-Smile Award - but I don't talk about that. I didn't get rid of the Bandon Banshee by smiling at her!" He waited for them to laugh; a few people smiled weakly.

It was with these words that Harry knew, without a doubt, that he wasn't going to learn anything from this man. Lockhart was more full of himself than Ron and had even less talent, which was saying something since Harry found out the red head had done rather poorly in all of his classes, so poorly in fact, that he was surprised the red-haired boy hadn't been expelled.

What followed this man's first few sentences was him handing out a test for them to complete within the next thirty minutes.

Harry looked down at his paper and read:

What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite color?

What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition.

What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?

On and on it went, over three sides of paper, right down to: 54. When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be.

Harry grinned as he decided on what his answers should be.

1. who cares.
2. Marrying Draco Malfoy.
3. Learning to use a spork.

On and on the answers went as Harry tried to make each one more outrageous than the last. Normally, Harry always did his best in any kind of school work, he loved excelling at everything he set his mind too and getting top marks in class was one of those things. However, the questions being asked on this test not only had absolutely nothing to do with Defense Against the Dark Arts, they seemed to merely have been given in order to satisfy the man's ego.

Half an hour later, Lockhart collected the papers and rifled through them in front of the class.

"Tut, tut - hardly any of you remembered that my favorite color is lilac. I say so in Year with the Yeti. And a few of you need to read Wanderings with Werewolves more carefully – I clearly state in chapter twelve that my ideal birthday gift would be harmony between all magic and non-magic peoples - though I wouldn't say no to a large bottle of Ogdeds Old Firewhisky!" He gave them another roguish wink.

Harry was looking at the man like he was an idiot, trying to determine if perhaps killing Gilderoy like he did Quirell would be a mercy, though on who he had yet to determine. Blaise and Neville shared a look, one that clearly told everyone who saw it that they felt this man was a complete waste of time. He did notice with some measure of amusement that Tracey looked to be on the fence. No doubt the questions in the test had given her ample support to Daphne's theory that the man was useless, and it was obvious she

was at least beginning to question whether or not Lockhart was all he claimed to be.

Hermione, on the other hand, was listening to Lockhart with rapt attention and gave a start when he mentioned her name.

". . . but Miss Hermione Granger knew my secret ambition is to rid the world of evil and market my own range of hair-care potions - good girl! In fact" - he flipped her paper over - "full marks! Where is Miss Hermione Granger." Hermione raised a trembling hand.

"Excellent!" beamed Lockhart. "Quite excellent! Take ten points for Gryffindor! And so - to business -" He bent down behind his desk and lifted a large, covered cage onto it.

"Now - be warned! It is my job to arm you against the foulest creatures known to wizard kind! You may find yourselves facing your worst fears in this room. Know only that no harm can befall you whilst I am here. All I ask is that you remain calm."

Harry frowned as he looked at the cage, it was rattling slightly and there were several odd noises that he couldn't place coming from it. The strange sounds almost reminded him of someone gibbering nonsense after inhaling an entire canister of helium. Lockhart placed a hand on the cover. Neville and Blaise looked at each other, then back to the cage while Tracey and Hermione were staring at it with some trepidation.

"I bet you it's something stupid and harmless," Daphne murmured to Harry, having leaned over to whisper in his ear.

"I don't take sucker bets," Harry whispered back with an amused smile. Daphne gave a slight pout that no one but him could see, before they both turned back to Lockhart and cage.

"I must ask you not to scream," said Lockhart in a low voice. "It might provoke them." As the whole class held its breath, Lockhart whipped off the cover. Inside the cage were around half a dozen small, blue creatures with pointy ears, goblin-like ears, only larger, two antennae on top of their heads, four wings behind their backs and three fingered hands. They reminded Harry of a mixture between the smurfs – which were from a television show he used to watch with Lisa – a goblin, and a fairy.

"I told you so," Daphne said with an enigmatic smile towards Harry.

"You did, but I expected nothing less from a fraud like Lockhart," Harry replied.

"Yes," he said dramatically. "Freshly caught Cornish pixies. " Seamus Finnigan couldn't control himself. He let out a snort of laughter that even Lockhart couldn't mistake for a scream of terror.

"Yes." He smiled at Seamus.

"Well, they're not - they're not very - dangerous, are they." Seamus choked.

"Don't be so sure!" said Lockhart, wagging a finger annoyingly at Seamus. "Devilish tricky little blighters they can be!" Harry didn't pay much attention to Lockhart, he knew quite a bit about Cornish Pixies, having read about them in one of his books. Instead he kept his attention on the pixies, whose voices were so shrill it was like listening to a lot of budgies arguing. The moment the cover had been removed, they had started jabbering and rocketing around, rattling the bars and making bizarre faces at the people nearest them.

"Right, then," Lockhart said loudly. "Let's see what you make of them!"

"Please tell me he's not going to open the cage," Harry said with a groan. While Pixies were for the most part, harmless. They were annoying and had a penchant for causing trouble and pandemonium where ever they were.

Harry should have realized that was a vain hope, however, as Lockhart opened the cage less then a second later. The entire room was soon thrown into chaos, as the pixies shot off in every direction. Several shot straight through the window, showering the back row with broken glass. The rest proceeded to wreck the classroom more effectively than a rampaging rhino. They grabbed ink bottles and sprayed the class with them, shredded books and papers, tore pictures from the walls, up-ended the waste basket, grabbed bags and books and threw them out of the smashed window; within minutes, half the class was sheltering under desks.

"Come on now - round them up, round them up, they're only pixies," Lockhart shouted. He rolled up his sleeves, brandished his wand, and bellowed, "Peskipiksi Pesternomi!" It had absolutely no effect; one of the pixies seized his wand and threw it out of the window, too. Lockhart gulped and dived under his own desk.

The only person who hadn't hidden behind a desk was Harry Potter.

Seeing as Harry was the only one not hiding from them, several of the pixies shot towards him, no doubt in an attempt to embarrass and humiliate him in some way, as pixies were wont to do. However, the few who got even close were smacked away by a backhand with enough force that they were sent into a wall. Before the rest of the pixies could make a go at him, Harry's wand was out and he quickly spun around in a circle.

"Prolixus Consto!" A wave of bluish energy was unleashed from Harry's wand. It looked like a rippling translucent blue wave, which spread through out the class room. Each time the wave of magic would hit one of the pixies the small creature would freeze in place, in the exact same position they had been in before getting hit. It looked almost like they had been frozen in time. Pretty soon, all of the picies were hit and became stationary. Another flick of Harry's wand sent all of the pixies back into the cage, where the bars slammed shut and once again locked them inside.

One by one, all of the students came out from under their desks.

"Nice job, Harry," Neville congratulated the raven haired boy. "That was pretty neat use of magic."

"I'll say," added Blaise, there was an observant gleam in his eyes as he looked at the wand in Harry's hand. "What kind of spell was that?"

"A wide scale stasis charm," Harry said, his voice taking on the slight lecturing quality he used when helping his friends with their homework. "What I did was unleash a continuous stream of magic from my wand in all directions by spinning three-hundred-sixty degrees. Anything the magic hits gets a thin film of magic formed over it, or them, placing them in a form of suspended animation, essentially freezing them in time. I had to modify the arithmetic

sequence of the more basic stasis charm in order to –"

"A simple, I froze them would have done," Blaise muttered, interrupting the raven-haired boy before he could really begin speaking in magical jargon.

"That's a rather ingenious spell," Hermione said, having heard Harry's explanation and understood at least some of it. "How come I've never heard of it?"

"Probably because I made it up just now," Harry replied with a shrug, getting his friends to gape at him.

Before anymore could be said, Lockhart jumped up from behind his desk. "Excellent job, Harry! I knew you had it in you. Of course! Had I not wanted you to learn how to deal with pixies through experience, I would have dealt with them using a..."

Harry tuned out the rest of the man's ramblings as the Bell signaling the end of class came. "Why don't we leave Goldilocks over there to his rambling and get to our next class?"

Tracey frowned at the insult to Lockhart, however, she kept her peace as Daphne walked next to Harry and linked arms with him. "Harry, I like how you think."

XoX

The rest of his classes for that day were the same as usual, the only difference being the material was slightly more difficult than first year. Not that this actually made a difference to Harry. He had already read his entire second year books, since he didn't want to waste time reading for school when he felt it could be better spent working on his two projects for the year.

Which was why he was currently in the Library, sitting at one of the tables with a book on alchemy opened up, and a muggle notepad right next to it with several notes already written inside.

Currently, Harry was trying his hand at creating his own transmutation circle. It was much more difficult than anything else he had done in alchemy, which had so far only consisted of memorizing

circles, chemicals and using the preexisting works to create the effects his teacher had been looking for. Now however, Harry was attempting to devise his own circle, and that required more than just memorizing and utilizing a premade circle.

A lot more thought had to go into the creation of a transmutation circle. First, he had to know what he wanted the circle to do. What was he trying to change? Harry had several thoughts on what he wanted his transmutation circle to accomplish, and had jotted down each one, giving a general description of what he wanted the circle to change and how he wanted it to be changed. From this group he had already chosen which one he wanted to do first.

The second thing he needed to know was which chemicals from the periodical table was he planning on using for the deconstruction phase. Did he want to use the chemicals that were often found in the bricks of Hogwarts? Or the soil that made up the ground? There were many different chemicals to choose from, as everything in this world had at least some of these chemicals in them.

After he had determined what he wanted to build and what he planned on deconstructing to build it, he would begin the process of creating a transmutation circle. Harry would write it on paper first, creating a transmutation circle was such a delicate process and could have such catastrophic results that it was a necessary precaution. Once he finished creating his circle on paper, and checked it over he would begin creating the real circle.

"There you are!"

Harry blinked when he saw a female leg come into his view. Looking up his green eyes met the brown ones Tracey Davis as she stood in front of him, arms crossed over her chest. "Everyone was wondering where you got off too after class was finished," she said, looking slightly peeved at him. "You took off before any of us could say anything, most of us thought you'd gone to the Common Room."

"Oh, sorry, I had actually just been hoping to finish something I was working on over the summer," Harry replied apologetically. His friends were likely already in the Common Room waiting for him. Standing up, Harry closed his book and notepad, shrinking them and putting the objects in his pocket. "Shall we get going then?" he said to Tracey.

Tracey didn't reply in words, at least not coherent words anyways, though she did grumble a bit in agitation as she grabbed his hand and began yanking him out of the doorway. They made their way to the Common Room where Tracey slammed the door open and marched into the room with a shout of, "I found him!"

Several people turned at the sound of her shout, however, after seeing who it was most of the students went back to what they were doing. Only the group at the large table were still watching as Tracey bodily dragged Harry behind him.

"Man, she's not even your girlfriend and already she's manhandling you, Potter," Blaise said with a smirk. Harry shot the dark-skinned boy a glare. He would have said something, but fortunately for him Tracey decided to do it for him.

"Oh shut up, Blaise!" she said with an irritated grunt as she pushed Harry into a seat, and then sat down herself. "Your just jealous because I'm not manhandling you like that."

"And why do you think I'd want to be manhandled by anyone, much less you?" asked Blaise. As Tracey and Blaise went off with several insults, jibes and comebacks, Harry turned to look at Hannah who was sitting right next to him. He looked down at her scroll and saw that she was working on her potions homework. He hadn't had that class yet, but having read the entire book already, along with having made several of the second year potions, including the one she was having to write a report on, figured he would be able to help her.

"Do you need any help, Han?" he asked.

It was almost amusing to watch as Hannah sighed in relief, like she had been hoping he would ask her but hadn't wanted to ask him herself. "Yes, please. I'm having trouble figuring out the importance of why Salamander skin needs to be added in first."

And this was how it began. Harry spent much of his time helping out his friends, talking with them about non school-related subjects in between. He had already finished his own homework, so he didn't need to worry about that, and his alchemy project was private work that he didn't want anyone to know about just yet. However, as he



finished helping Daphne with her Transfiguration paper, he saw Mandy Brocklehurst sitting alone, reading a book on Charms.

He frowned, feeling a tug at his heartstrings. She looked lonely. The way she occasionally looked up to watch all of the other students hanging out. From the expression on her face it was clear she wanted to make friends, but he could also see something holding her back, most likely nerves.

"Lisa," he said, turning to the girl who was talking with Hermione about something. When Lisa's attention was on him he asked, "what do you know about Mandy Brocklehurst?"

Lisa blinked, confusion evident on her face. Then she noticed the girl of his question sitting alone, and seemed to realize why he was asking. She shrugged, and said, "not much, Mandy's pretty shy from what I've seen. She never spends time with any of the other students, and all last year she spent her free time in the Ravenclaw tower, reading. I'm honestly surprised to see her here."

Harry nodded his head before standing up. He made his way over to Mandy, who noticed his approach after a while. It was oddly amusing to see the way her eyes widened, or the way her cheeks flushed. It seemed Lisa's and his opinion of the girl being incredibly shy were accurate.

She looked away when he stopped in front of her.

"Would you like to join my friends and I?" he asked the girl whose eyes were once again on him and had a look of shock.

"J... join you?" she stuttered.

"Yeah, join us. You know, come over to that table where we talk and study together," Harry said, looking at her with a smile. He had to blink however, when Mandy's image had another one transposed over hers. That of a six year old boy with raven hair and green eyes, a look of dejection on his face about something only he could see, but that Harry knew instinctively was from seeing a bunch of other six year old kids spending time together while he was alone.

He blinked again and the image was gone.

"You guys seem really close. I wouldn't want to... impose," Mandy said. Her words said one thing, but the way she looked over at the table told another.

"Why would you be imposing on us?" he asked, getting her to look at him. Harry held out his hand to her and said, "come on, I'll introduce you to everyone."

Mandy looked at the hand for a moment, almost as if it would bite. Tentatively, she reached out and placed her hand in his, blushing as she did so. Harry helped the girl to her feet and began pulling her with him over to the table where his friends were sitting.

XoX

Ginny Weasley watched as Harry helped his friends with their homework and sighed. He looked so incredibly handsome, with his messy raven hair and those piercing green eyes. The smile on his face was enough to make her melt, and she wished fervently that he would give her that smile. The dream images of him she had conjured up in her mind did not do the real Harry justice. Ron obviously didn't know what he was talking about when he said Harry was a talentless loser.

She really wanted to go and talk to him, but didn't know if it was a good idea. He was with all of his friends, and from what she had learned they were a tight knit group. Would they welcome her? She had heard that Harry was extremely nice and approachable, but what if his friends found her annoying?

But Harry wouldn't let them be mean to her would he? No, of course not. Everyone she had talked to said Harry was very nice and didn't tolerate bullies, so he wouldn't tolerate his friends bullying her either.

Taking a deep breath, Ginny Weasley made the stand up. However, before she could begin making her way to Harry, he walked over to some girl with brown hair. She didn't know what they talked about, but when Harry went back to the table it was with the girl in hand.

Sitting back down Ginny decided that she would introduce herself to Harry later.

Maybe she would ask her friend how best to get Harry's attention...

XoX

I do apologize for not updating this yesterday, I won't give any excuses because I updated one of my other fics. So, here you are.

Pokemaster12 out.

## Chapter 10: Days of Old

XoX

It was early in the morning when Harry woke up. Looking out of the window, he could see that the sun still had yet to come up, with only one or two rays peaking out behind the mountains. Standing, he went over to his trunk and began getting dressed.

Since the start of school the days had begun to wear on at Hogwarts and Harry Potter began falling into a routine similar to the one he had during his first year at the school for witchcraft and wizardry. In many ways, the similarities to the new year and his last year made it feel almost like he had never left Hogwarts. It was only his memories of the summer, his time with the Flamels, Angeline, Lisa and the few times he had spent with his friends from school that reminded him he had spent three months away.

His classes were going well; he was the top of his class, same as last year. Not that he had expected any less: while Harry had not focused on his schoolwork as much as he had his alchemy during the summer, he had still read all of the books and worked on all of the spells, at least those spells that he hadn't learned during his first year. As always when it came to his academics, Harry held himself to a very high standard and, given his competitive nature, anything less than being the best was unacceptable.

While not going as well as he had hoped, his alchemy was also progressing. He had determined what he wanted his first transmutation circle to do, and was now in the process of figuring out how to do it. It was harder than he expected, mainly because the circle was something that could be considered completely original. At first, he had been planning on using a preexisting circle as a base for his, and just modifying it for what he needed. It may not have made it truly original, but since he was just starting out Harry felt it was best to go with something easy.

Unfortunately, there was no circle that even came close to what he wanted. He had learned of this fact after scouring through all of the alchemy books he had not yet read; despite the hours he had spent searching, nothing had come up. Thus Harry was forced to create his transmutation circle from scratch. Still it wasn't all bad, while

having to make a circle without any real reference would be difficult, it would also be a challenge.

And if one thing could be said about Harry Potter, it was that he enjoyed a good challenge.

As he finished getting dressed in a pair of dark green training shorts and a sleeveless black shirt, all thoughts were dispelled from his mind. He turned to look over at the only other person who was awake this early in the morning. "Ready, Neville?" he asked, his voice a whisper.

Neville Longbottom, dressed in a pair of red training shorts and a short sleeve red shirt, the clothing was actually one of Harry's alchemical creations, having been transmuted from a pair of regular clothes. Unlike Transfigurations, which would wear off after the magic used for the spell had run out, Transmutations were permanent changes and were the reason Harry used alchemy to make the clothes.

Having come to look up to Harry, Neville had taken what the raven haired youth said about physical fitness being a necessary component to a healthy lifestyle to heart. Almost every morning he would wake up and join Harry on his runs. It had been hard for him at first; in fact, the first week Neville had been unable to run more than a single mile before exhaustion hit him. However, with some encouragement from Harry, the round-faced boy hadn't gotten discouraged and continued running with him. Now he was able to keep a pretty decent pace and capable of running three miles a day. A decent feat all things considered.

"I'm ready," Neville said in a hushed whisper. Harry nodded and together the two made their way down to the Gryffindor common room. As they reached the last step, Hermione Granger greeted them.

"Good morning you two," she said in a friendly, if slightly sleepy voice. She was already dressed in a pair of dark sweat shorts and a sleeveless shirt. She had apparently packed them from home, and though they had not been originally intended to be used as work out clothes, they worked just as well as what Harry himself was wearing.

"Good morning Hermione," they both greeted. While Neville just wanted to be fit like Harry, Hermione had truly taken his words on

magic and it's connection to the physical fitness of a body to heart. She had actually been in even worse shape than Neville, though this was through no real fault of her own. The simple fact was at their age boys had more strength than girls, physically anyways. Harry knew better than to underestimate a female simply because of their gender; there were at least two women in their mid twenties at his dojo who were more capable fighters than he was. Underestimating someone because of their gender was foolish.

"Let's head down to the grounds," Harry said, and followed through with his own advice by beginning to walk. "The others are likely already outside waiting."

True to Harry's word, the two other people who had decided to exercise with Harry were already waiting outside, both of them doing warm up stretches.

"Daphne, Susan," Harry greeted as he bounded down the last few stairs, Neville and Hermione following slightly behind him.

"Good morning, Harry," Susan greeted softly. Like Neville she was wearing a pair of his alchemy created clothing, a light yellow shirt and black spandex like shorts that went down to her knees. Surprisingly enough, Susan was in the best shape out of all his friends who agreed to train with him. Though in retrospect, Harry felt he should not have been so surprised. Her aunt was the head of the DMLE and had been a top auror in her time. No doubt she had ensured that her niece was physically fit.

"Harry," Daphne greeted with a smile, which was much warmer and more kind now that it was just her and a few friends. It had been a surprise when the blond Slytherin girl had met up with them the first day to begin running. He had honestly not expected her to even be awake, much less willing to work up a sweat with him and the others. When he had asked her about it, she had just shrugged and told him she was used to getting up early, and that her dance instructor had made her do daily exercises when she had taken up lessons. Though she had not done any exercise for a while, she was still in decent shape and in close second for being physically fit next to Susan.

As everyone got their good morning greeting out of the way, the group of five began their morning run. They jogged around the Black

Lake, and Harry kept pace with them for a few laps, talking and encouraging them before he began his sprints. In an effort to gain more speed he had combined long distance running with short burst sprints that increased in time the longer he ran, starting with sixty seconds sprints, before moving into two minutes, then four, before going back down to a minute.

As always Harry was the last to finish, as his run was nearly three times as long as the others. Then they began the other forms of exercises Harry had recommended. For the girls, they would do stretches to work on their flexibility. Daphne had also helped her two female friends come up with their own routine by adding in the dance work outs her instructor had made her do. Meanwhile, Neville and Harry had done strength increasing exercises, sit ups, push ups, and the like.

Not being in as good shape as Harry, Neville could still only do around twenty of each exercise, though Harry had expected that. No one can just start of doing one hundred and fifty reps of everything. It took time, and Neville had only started working out two weeks ago. He figured in another month or so his friend would be up to thirty of everything and the amount would just keep increasing from there.

This time Harry finished his exercise first, even though he did more then four times the amount as Neville, he also didn't struggle as much. His friend was nearing the end of his crunches, and was red-faced and was huffing and puffing in an effort to regain his breath.

Walking a little distance away, Harry sighed as he took out a small object from his left pocket. It was a wooden dummy has a cylindrical body with arms and a leg. Sometimes it was called a Muk Yan Jong or Mook Jong which meant "wooden man post" and it was usually used in Wing Chun Kung Fu. Even though Harry did not study that particular style he had been able to slightly modify the dummies "arms and legs" so that it was more suited to practicing his mixed martial arts style.

While he would have liked a sparring partner, this was at the moment the best he could come up with. And it did have it's benefits, one of which was that he could use it anytime he wanted. Whether he wished to train in the middle of the night or during the early hours of the morning like now, the dummy was always available.

There were many benefits to his physical training as well. Using a wooden dummy was a big help in develop his striking power, increasing the strength he delivered his punches and kicks. In practicing, it simply wasn't enough to deliver his strikes into thin air like he had done last year, quite simply because it was impossible to estimate whether or not he had enough strength to do damage. Punching a wooden object would help him strengthen not only his hitting force but also his skin and muscles as well. In an actual training, he wouldn't be able to punch or kick as hard with a sparring partner.

Another advantage of its usage was the opportunity to master the techniques in guarding and opposing an attack, kicks, balance and footwork. The proper positioning of his arms and legs, including his posture could also be practiced. Since it is available to use any time of the day, he could train as long as he wanted. The more he practiced, the faster he would be able to develop his skills.

And so Harry set the dummy into the ground, enlarged it, and went to work. He would lash out with hands and feet, elbows and knees. As he struck an arm on the wooden dummy would move, rotating the entire body of the training dummy and causing another arm or leg to lash out and hit him. Harry would block and defend, using his forearms and shins. Occasionally he would dodge entirely, moving by bare milometers and letting the appendage striking at him pass close enough he could feel the air displacement, and sometimes moving far out of it's range.

He would close in, moving around the dummy as he struck. As his style involved a lot of movement, Harry would often spin into the dummies guard, rotating on the balls of his feet as he spun around until his back was facing the dummy. He would block and push the attacks from the rotating arms and legs, launch an elbow strike, and then move back out. His movements continued, on and on in a never ending period of dodge, strike and counterstrike. And he didn't stop until he could feel his knuckles begin to bleed, painting the place he hit the dummy a dark red.

Finishing up with a last combination, Harry stepped back and let the dummy stop moving. Shrinking it and putting it back into his pocket, he let his looked at his tape covered hands. They were fairly red around the knuckles, with the blood beginning to seep into other spots. With a sigh, he undid the tape and vanished it, before turning



his attention to his hands and willing his magic to that area. He didn't want to cast a healing charm since that would return his hands to their previous state, and he wanted them to heal a little more naturally so they would gain calluses and toughen up.

With his own exercise for the day finished he looked around to see that Neville and the girls had already finished their own workout, and were now sitting under the shade of a tree where they had been watching him. This was not unusual as Harry was the only one who did the extra combat work out. Walking over to the group, he asked, "Ready to get back inside?"

"Merlin yes," Hermione said, still looking a little flushed. Susan and Daphne both grinned at the girl's tone, secretly pleased that they were in better shape than Hermione.

As they began making their way inside, Neville, who was walking on Harry's left asked, "so when are you going to teach me to do that?"

"You mean hand-to-hand combat?" asked Harry, blinking for a second as he guessed what Neville was asking.

"Yeah."

"I can't," said Harry with a shrug. Seeing his friend's look he continued by stating, "the style you saw me use was made specifically for my body type, and I only know the basics of each of the styles I combined to create it. But even if I were to teach one of the styles I use, you wouldn't be able to use them to their full capacity due to you having a stalker build then me. If I had to guess, your style would rely more on jiu-jitsu throws and holds, and using your mass to deliver powerful punches. And I unfortunately know nothing of jiu-jitsu, or any style you would need." As Neville's face began to look downtrodden, Harry said, "if you really want to learn, I would suggest getting a martial arts instructor to teach you."

Neville nodded, accepting what Harry said as true. Though he still looked fairly dejected, which was further confirmed when he sighed and said, "I would get an instructor but I don't think my Gran would let me. She's not too keen on consorting with muggles. She doesn't hate them," the round faced boy added at his friend's frown, "she just doesn't think it's good for us to mix, cuz we might accidentally use magic and all."

While Harry wasn't sure he approved of Augusta Longbottoms opinions on non magicals, he understood that most wizards felt this way thanks to the persecutions of witches and wizards that had periodically happened through out the ages. The Salem Witch trials being the most recent.

Though there wasn't much to fear now. In fact, Harry was sure that most non magicals wouldn't care if someone was magical. Prejudice in the mundane world had gone down since the early 1500s', women were men's equal in almost every way, though Harry conceded that Britain was still in a mode of transition unlike France and America, where freedom was an all-important concept. Not to say that women didn't have the same freedoms as the other major countries, however, most woman in Britain still believed in tradition, so far as Harry knew.

Harry, Neville and Hermione parted ways with Daphne and Susan, who walked off towards the Slytherin and Hufflepuff common rooms respectively while they made for their own house common room. Once inside of their own common room, the three Gryffindors went to take a shower, before going back up to their rooms and getting dressed.

It didn't take long after that for the three to make their way down to the Great Hall for breakfast, where they met up with Daphne and Susan again. Aside from them Tracey was also there, though from the way she was rubbing the sleep from her eyes and the slight messiness of her hair, it was only because Daphne had dragged her along with her.

"You're looking beautiful this morning, Tracey," Harry said with a grin. Behind the brunette Slytherin, Daphne hid her mouth behind her hand in order to cover her giggle.

Tracey glared at Harry, though it was completely ineffective due to her having just rolled out of bed. "Oh can it, Pott...er," she grumbled, yawning midway through his name. This caused a few chuckles all around and Tracey glared at the group before turning her angry eyes on Daphne. "You see, this is why I didn't want to come down. Why did you wake me so bloody early?"

Daphne just gave her friend an oh-so-innocent smile. "You sleep too much, Tracey. I'm just trying to help you become more active."

"Why would I want to sweat like a pig like you lot seem to enjoy doing," Tracey said, yawning again. "I prefer... staying in my bed to getting up at the crack of dawn just so I can get all gross and sticky."

The Great Hall wasn't that crowded yet, as most of the students were only just waking. They all walked over to the Ravenclaw table and sat down. As if sensing they were there, food appeared on the large plates and everyone began piling the food onto their own plates. All except Tracey who put her head down and looked like she was trying to go back to sleep.

"If you're so tired, why don't you back to your common room?" asked Harry.

Tracey opened her eyes a crack to look at him as she said, "I'm already up thanks to Daphne. There wouldn't be much of a point going back to bed just to wake up half an hour later, now would there?" Harry conceded the point with a nod, before he placed his cup right in front of her. Tracey blinked as she stared at the goblet, which held some kind of steaming liquid in it. She looked up at Harry, her eyes questioning.

"It's a special tea I made," Harry said. "It's got a lot of vitamins that give you energy, and should help you wake up. Have some." Tracey looked from the tea to Harry, then back to the tea and to Harry again. She did this several more times before deciding to do as he ask. Taking a sip of the tea she was surprised to find that even though steam was rising up from the liquid, it wasn't scalding hot, but was more in between lukewarm and hot. It was also delicious, with a subtle blend of flavors that energized and invigorated her. She quickly guzzled down the rest, giving a content sigh as she set his goblet down.

"Ah! That was really good," she said with her eyes closed and a happy smile on her face. She opened them again a moment later and looked at Harry. "Thanks for that, I actually feel a lot better."

"Haa... your welcome," Harry said with a slight sigh, looking at his now empty cup he decided that letting Tracey take a sip of his tea might not have been his best idea. Tapping the goblet with his wand,

he signaled to the house elves that he would like a refill, and smiled when more of the steamy tea filled his cup. He was going to have to find some way to thank those little guys working in the kitchens, those house-elves did good work.

By now, the Great Hall was crowded with people chatting away. Harry's group was joined by the others; Blaise, Hannah, Padma, Lisa, and Terry. As they joined, their area began to get louder as the small group of friends began talking to each other about different subjects.

"A-Ah, excuse me." At the sound of a voice, and one he recognized, Harry looked behind him to see Mandy standing there, clinging her book bag to her chest and a shy blush on her face. "Do you ah, mind if I... I mean if I..."

"Do you want to sit with us?" asked Harry, looking faintly amused. This was the first time Mandy had tried to sit with them that he hadn't been forced to drag her over. It was somewhat entertaining since she had been spending time with them since the beginning of the school year, and just went to show how shy the poor girl really was.

Mandy looked away from Harry's intense green eyes, her blush increasing in hue. However, she nodded her head once, letting him know that she did indeed wish to sit with them.

Harry looked over at Tracey, who took a few seconds to notice his gaze. When she did, he tilted his head towards Mandy. As Tracey looked over and caught sight of the shy girl she sighed, already understanding what he wanted. She looked put out for a second, and it was clear she didn't really want to move. She only relented in the end because Harry still giving her the look.

When Tracey moved over from her previous seat, Harry looked at Mandy and patted the spot next to him. "Sit down," he said, and Mandy quickly did so, sending Tracey an apologetic look as she began to quietly fill her plate.

It was at this time that Snape walked into the hall for breakfast. Only Harry seemed to notice, though he didn't pay much attention to the man. At least, not until he sat down and the loudest and most disgusting fart he had ever heard emanated from the man. So loud

was this fart that the entire Great Hall became filled with silence. Everyone looked over at Snape, whose pale face was boiling red in both embarrassment and rage.

The potions master abruptly stood up and looked over his chair. Not finding anything he sat back down, and another fart erupted from the man. If anything the second one was nearly twice as loud as the first. Harry hadn't thought it was possible, but after the second fart Snape's face took on an even deeper shade of red. The greasy haired man stood up again and pulled out his wand, where he began casting a slew of spell detection wards on his chair.

They were fairly advanced spells from what Harry could see of the wand movements, and he had to admit to being impressed. He was incapable of casting at least half of those spells, many of them requiring more magic than his reserves had. And the few that he could cast cost anywhere from half his magic to completely exhausting his stores of energy.

After a few moments the spells seemed to come up negative, which Harry judged by the frown on the man's face. Snape sat down once again, and once again he farted. This time, the sound was so loud and of such epic proportions that the windows in the Great Hall and all of the plates, goblets, and tableware shook at the sound of the man's fart.

The silence that had come from hearing the generally despised Potions Professor ripping gas like nobodies business was brought to an end when someone at the Gryffindor table began to snicker. Before long nearly everyone was having a laughing fit, even a few of the teachers, namely Professors McGonagall and Flitwick looked like they were trying and failing to keep a stern facade up. Meanwhile Snape looked apoplectic with rage, his entire face mottled with red.

"Dear Merlin, I wonder what's up with our head of house?" asked Blaise, looking like he was somewhere between wanting to laugh with the rest of the student population, and feeling mortified that his head of house just had something as embarrassing as farting loudly enough to rattle glass had happened.

"Who cares!" cackled Tracey. Out of all the Slytherin's Tracey was the only one who utterly despised Snape. While Harry knew that

Daphne and Blaise disliked the man as a person, they at least respected him for his knowledge in potions. Tracey on the other hand hated the man more than anyone else in the entire world, barring maybe Draco Malfoy.

On Harry's other side, Daphne shook her head at her friends laughing. "And this is the best friend I spent the better part of my childhood with," she murmured.

"She was always like this then?" asked Harry, a curious expression on his face.

"Yes," Daphne sighed, she looked at her friend, who was still laughing and shook her head. "Her maturity is still that of a five year old."

Tracey seemed to pick up the blonds last comment because she stopped laughing and gave her friend a pout. "Just because I enjoy having fun doesn't mean I'm childish," she complained.

Daphne rolled her eyes. "Of course it doesn't."

Frowning, Tracey opened her mouth to speak. However, another voice, one that caused every to stop whatever conversation they were in, said, "Fifty points from Gryffindor and detention after my class, Mr. Potter, for your insolent and childish prank."

Harry turned to look at the potions Professor standing behind him with narrowed eyes. "Are you that biased against me that you think I would pull a prank on you?" he asked slowly, enunciating each word with perfect clarity.

"Who else could have done this?" said Snape, sneering at Harry. "Who else would have done this but the spawn of that idiot, Potter? Do not play dumb child; I know it was you!"

"You're an idiot," Harry said.

"What did you say!" snarled Snape, his hands clenching themselves in to fists.

"I said you're an idiot," Harry repeated, louder this time. The entire hall became silent, many people listening in as the confrontation

began. "An insufferable fool who can't come to terms with the fact that I'm not my father. I was only one when he died, so I don't even know him. And yet here you are, claiming I'm like that man, a man I can't even remember. Considering how it's only been a minute before this prank happened, it is painfully obvious that you didn't even bother getting evidence on who might have committed this prank, much less confirming any. That means you simply jumped to the conclusion, making the assumption that I was the one who caused this prank simply because I am James Potter's son."

"Another fifty points for your cheek, Potter!" Snape said with a sneer.

"I don't think so," said Harry, standing up and glaring at the potions professor with narrowed eyes. Snape's eyes flashed in anger and his nostrils flared, he looked almost like he might attack Harry. However, before anything more could happen, Professor Dumbledore and McGonagall appeared beside the two.

"It is not your place to punish my students, Severous," Professor McGonagall said in her stern voice.

"It is when your student broke the rules to humiliate me," Snape argued. Professor McGonagall's eyes narrowed, no doubt in anger at having her favorite student be subject to this mans accusations.

Before the situation could deteriorate further, Dumbledore turned to Harry and said, "were you the one who played this prank on Professor Snape, Harry?"

"No sir," Harry shook his head.

"But he's lying of course!" Snape countered, glaring at Harry with as much hate as possible.

"Why don't you close that mouth before you make even more of a fool of yourself then you already have, professor," Harry said in a cold voice, the sound almost coming out in a hiss. All of Harry's friends shivered at the tone, and the three teachers turned to him with wide eyes.

"What did you say, you sniveling little brat!"

"I said keep those gums of yours shut before you make a fool of yourself," Harry said. Not deigning to listen to the man's spluttering he turned to Dumbledore. "I can prove that I am not the one who played the prank on Snape."

"Professor Snape, Harry," Dumbledore chided.

"Perhaps when he matures a little bit I will deign to call him that," Harry said, ignoring Snape's rage as he pulled out his wand. Coughing a bit to clear his throat, he said, "I, Harry James Potter, Heir to the House of Potter, do hereby swear on my life, my magic and my title as the Heir Apparent to House Potter that I did NOT play this recent prank on Severous Snape, nor have I ever pranked him before. So Mote it be."

Silence had once again swept through the Great Hall at Harry's Wizards Oath. It was one thing to swear on your magic or your life, to swear on both was rare, and for one to swear on their title as the Heir to a House was pretty much unheard of. That Harry had done so left no doubt in everyone's mind that he had not been the one to prank Snape. To prove this, Harry cast a quick lumos charm, lighting up the tip of his wand.

Harry gave Snape an even stare, before turning around and sitting back down. "Perhaps you should learn to think with less bias, Snape. Acting on your hatred of someone's father makes you look like a childish bully."

Snape snarled as he made to move towards Harry, however, he was stopped as Dumbledore rested a hand on his shoulder. "While I may not approve of the way he said it, young Mr. Potter is right. I am most disappointed in you, Severous."

Snape gaped at the older man. "B-But Headmaster... he..."

"That is enough, Severous. It is clear that Mr. Potter did not commit this act against you, and it is equally clear that you are the one who attacked him. While I do not approve of his words, I cannot rightly blame him for his anger towards you since it was you who caused it in the first place. Now, I will want to see you in my office before class, Severous, where we shall talk about your prejudice towards Mr. Potter."



Snape looked like he had swallowed something particularly foul, however, he nodded nevertheless. Giving Harry one last glare, Snape stalked off, his robe billowing behind him as he stormed out of the Great Hall.

"I apologize for his behavior towards you, Mr. Potter," Dumbledore said, nodding his head towards the young man. "Should he continue to act this way after I speak with him, do not hesitate to inform me."

"Yes, sir. And thank you," Harry said. Dumbledore gave one last nod before he too left the Great Hall, most like to head back to his office. Professor McGonagall looked at Harry for a moment, before doing the same, only she went back to her table to finish eating.

Like all mornings owls soon began flying into the room, out of the swarm Harry could pick out that of Hedwig, who was the only snowy owl in the entire selection of Hogwarts Owls. "Hello girl," Harry said as Hedwig landed right next to his food. Harry immediately noticed a few of her feathers were out of place and there were a few brown owl feathers stuck to her.

Hedwig stuck out her leg, showing him the letter. Unlike usual when she retrieved letters this one was not wrapped around her leg, but being carried in her claw. Harry grabbed it and opened the letter so he could read:

Hey Harry!

I'm glad your doing well, though your studying sounds hard. There's not much going on here, it's still really boring without you. Everyone else agrees. I really wish you here.

Harry continued reading the letter from Lisa, which talked about what she was doing in school, how much she missed him and that she and her dad had gotten into another fight when his friend had tried to go to school wearing a spaghetti strap shirt that showed her belly button. She also asked him questions on the specifics of what he was working on in class. This was more or less the standard of what all of their letters had consisted of. Harry had kept his word, his first night at Hogwarts he had sent his first letter to his friend, it was not surprising that he had already received one from her fairly quickly. It wasn't much, but even with just a letter to go on he knew that Lisa was overjoyed that he did as she asked.

When he was finished reading, Harry looked at Hedwig, who was eating a piece of bacon. "You fought the carrier bird to deliver this to me didn't you?" he asked. Hedwig turned to look at him before dipping her head and flapping her wings once in a gesture that Harry felt was meant to be a shrug. "This is the fourth time you've done this, I'm beginning to think you might just want to stay at the owl post so you can retrieve the letter before it's given to another owl."

Hedwig tilted her head from side to side, after a second or two she bobbed her head up and down. Harry reached out and stroked her feathers with a finger, which she nipped affectionately before taking off.

"I swear, Harry, you have the weirdest bird I've ever seen," Hannah said with a shake of her head. "I've never heard of another owl attacking a post owl just so she could deliver a letter from someone."

"She does seem a bit jealous," Hermione added.

"Yeah. But that bird is scary smart too," Tracey said. "I swear, sometimes when it stares at me I can almost feel its looking into my soul."

"Alright, alright, enough poking fun at Hedwig, especially when she's not here anymore," Harry said.

"So what's the letter say, Harry?" asked Tracey.

Harry gave her a look. "Now why would I tell you that?"

"Because you love me," Tracey said with an innocent smile, too innocent to be real. She batted her eyelashes at him playfully, causing Harry to roll his eyes.

"Be that as it may, I won't be showing you what my friend wrote," he said. "That's between me and Lisa."

"Aw, come on!" Tracey said, reaching over Mandy in an effort to snag the letter from Harry's hand. "Let me see it!"

"Not happening."

"Just a peak!"

"No, and can you stop shoving your arm in Mandy's face? It's rude."

"Let me see your letter and I'll stop."

As the two continued their playing their game of keep away, with a confused Mandy in the center, Terry leaned over to Blaise and said, "you know, seeing entertaining moments like this is half the reason I sit here."

Blaise held a smirk on his face as he watched as Tracey, who was now practically crawling on top of Harry to get his letter. "I hear you."

XoX

As the bell rang, signaling an end to class, Professor Flitwick squeaked, "remember to have that revision on the Wingardium Leviosa finished by next class!"

Hermione, Hannah, Susan, and Neville all got up to leave. However, as she was about to walk towards the door, Susan noticed that Harry was not following them. "Harry?" she asked, getting the green eyed boy to look over at her.

He gave her a quick smile and made a shooing gesture. "You four go on ahead, I've actually got to speak to Professor Flitwick about something," he said. Susan hesitated, looking unsure. However, after getting some more reassurance that Harry would catch up with them soon, she left. When everyone else was gone, Harry made his way over to Professor Flitwick, who was collecting papers off his desk. "Professor?"

Flitwick looked up and gave a jovial smile to Harry. "Yes, Mr. Potter? Is there something I can help you with?" he asked.

"Yes, actually," Harry said. He paused, going over the explanation he was hoping to give Flitwick in his head. When he was sure that he knew what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say it, he continued, saying, "I was hoping you might be able to help me with a problem I'm having."

Flitwick raised an eyebrow. "The standard procedure when a student is having some kind of issue is to go to their head of house, you know. I can't break protocol."

"Not that kind of issue," Harry said, shaking his head. "It's... well, I don't know how close to a charms issue it is, but given that you are the Ravenclaw Head of House, I would suspect that you know the most about theory out of all the other teachers."

"So it's an issue on magic then?" asked Professor Flitwick. When Harry nodded his head the diminutive Professor smiled and squeaked, "well, that I can help you with. You came to the right person for theory, while Minerva is a very powerful witch and knows her Transfiguration, magical theory is often lost on her and the other teachers. Barring Albus Dumbledore. So what did you need help with?"

"Recently I heard from a reliable source that the floo network uses a wizard's own magic in order to propel him towards his destination," started Harry.

Flitwick nodded. "Yes it does. It's a tricky bit of charms work, very impressive, if I do say so myself. It was actually originally designed to be powered by a group of wizards who simply fed it power every year or so. But after realizing the impracticality of it, that is to say, that after the floo kept running out of magic to power it every day, they had to come up with a way to power the floo network continually, while not relying on a group of wizards to make it work."

"Interesting," Harry said in fascination. Hearing Flitwick's words made him realize that he had made the right decision in coming to the charms professor for this. He had not heard of the floo's history, but it was a riveting bit of information, and one he would probably study further. "You should know then that the more powerful the wizard, the more power the floo network would use to push them forward." He paused, waiting. At Flitwick's nod of understanding Harry continued. "I've used the floo twice now, and each time I've done I was launched out of the floo like a muggle cannonball."

"I see," said Flitwick, "you must be quite powerful magically."

"That was my thought as well, and I won't deny that I probably have a bit more power than a second year should," said Harry, trying not to sound arrogant. It was hard when talking about one's own power and capabilities, that was one of the reasons Harry rarely talked about himself to others. Shaking his head he continued. "However, I also had another thought. Albus Dumbledore is one of the most powerful wizards in Britain, maybe even the world. Yet I can't see him flying out of the floo in an uncontrolled manner like I have. This led me to theory that it's not just about how much magic you have, but how much control you have over your own magic."

"Because I'm so young and I have more magic than most kids my age, I have yet to gain the kind of control an adult does. I also believe this means I'm wasting magic when I cast a spell."

"That is a very sound theory, Mr. Potter," said Professor Flitwick, looking interested in what Harry was saying. "It is not one I've heard before, but if what you say is true then your situation is very unique. I take it you wish to find some way to test this theory?"

"Partially," Harry said. "There is more to it than just that. I have been trying to find some means of discovering just how much magic I have in comparison to others. That would help me determine how much power I have. But I also want to discover how much magic I am wasting when I cast a spell. If I'm using more magic than I need when I spell cast, then that means I'm not using my reserves to their full potential, and will need to find a way of gaining more control over my magic."

"So this is a three part problem," Professor Flitwick said. "You wish to first discover how much magic you have compared to other witches and wizards, discover how much excess magic is released when you cast a spell, and find a way to gain control of your magic."

"Exactly," Harry said, feeling pleased that the diminutive professor was able to sum up his desires so efficiently.

"Hmmm..." Flitwick frowned as he said, "fortunately for you, the first problem is easy. There is a spell that any trained medi-witch or wizard knows that can scan the amount of latent magic a magical being possesses. It's called the Transeo charm. However, the charm in and of itself won't do you any good, you have to use the Codicillus

charm so that the scan will write itself out on parchment, and the Junctus charm to link the other two charms together."

"Couldn't I just use a dictation quill?"

"No," Professor Flitwick shook his head. "The dictation quill does just that, it may write out everything that you or someone else says, but nothing else. The Codicillus charm actually dictates notes based upon your mind, and the Junctus charm will link the magic of the Transeo charm to the Codicillus charm as a form of magical binding. It's a tricky spell combination to use, from what I hear. I myself do not know the spells, as I am not a medi-wizard."

"I see," Harry gave a nod as the feeling of excitement coursed through him. He had not expected there to already be an existing spell that would tell him how powerful he was. Now, all he would have to do was learn the three spells needed, and practice until he could properly cast the spells, and link them together.

With this thought in mind, Harry began launching several questions at the diminutive professor. "And is it possible to use the Transeo charm on oneself? Also, would I have to go to a medi-witch in order to get the spell performed on me? Or can I learn it myself?"

Professor Flitwick smiled at Harry's enthusiasm. It was good to see that the young man had picked up his mother's inquisitiveness and propensity for learning.

"While I have never heard of someone casting this particular series of spells on themselves, I do believe it is possible. As to your other question, the answer is no, you do not have to get a medi-witch to perform the spells on you. However, the Transeo spell is a spell that is normally taught to medi-witches only, though you may be able to find the spell in the Hogwarts library."

"Now, as to your second question, I am sorry to say that there is no spell capable of telling you how much magic you are wasting when you cast."

Harry felt his hope drop as he heard that. If there wasn't an already existing method of discovering how much excess magic was let out when they cast a spell, then there was very little chance of Harry being able to learn how much magic he was wasting. While he knew

that he was intelligent, Harry also knew he had limitations. The simple fact was he did not know enough magical theory to truly create a spell from scratch. Spell crafting was a combination of arithmancy, or the magical properties of numbers, and how it correlates to wand movements; and an intimate knowledge of magic and how it interacts with a wizard. Harry didn't have trouble admitting that while he had a good grasp of his own magic in many ways, he was still lacking and had no true knowledge on how magic interacted with the world around it.

"But do not give up hope, Mr. Potter," Flitwick spoke, startling Harry out of his negative thoughts. When he looked back at the diminutive professor, Flitwick's squeaky voice continued. "While there is no spell that can tell you how much magic you waste when casting, there is a spell used by the aurors forces to learn how much power they put into their spells when cast. I believe the spell is a combination of charms and runes. However, since I myself know very little about runes, I can't say for sure."

"I see..." Harry nodded thoughtfully, before he thanked the professor and left.

Despite learning that there was no spell that would allow him to discover how much magic he wasted during spell-casting, Professor Flitwick had given him hope that he could come up with something. All he would need to do was learn the spell aurors used to discover how much power they put into their spells.

However, he would need to take things one step at a time. First, he would learn the spells needed to find out how much magic he had. After that, he could see about learning the auror spells.

XoX

It was nearing the end of the day, and Harry was walking down one of the many corridors at Hogwarts, making his way towards the common room. As he did however, a voice called out.

"Ah, Harry! A moment please!"

Harry felt his eyes widen as he heard the voice of Professor Lockhart. He began cursing in his head as the man found him. If

there was one problem that Harry was having at Hogwarts, it was Lockhart.

Through out the start of the year he had noticed that the man seemed to take an unhealthy interest in him. The man had tried holding him back after class, and could often be found wandering the corridor searching for him. Harry even heard from Neville that the man had been seen in both the Gryffindor common room and the common room all of the students went to while searching for him. He could only thank the heavens that he had been in an unused classroom the few times the man had gone there.

It was beginning to become an annoyance, and several times Harry had to restrain himself from hexing the man. How women like Christine, Hermione, and Tracey, one of whom was taught by Celestina (who Harry felt was a powerful and cunning witch in her own right) and the other two were a pair of the most intelligent witches in his age group, could ever believe in the garbage Lockhart's books crapped out was beyond him. Just looking at the man should give anyone with basic skills in logic and observation enough evidence to let them know that the man was a fraud of the highest caliber.

Thankfully Tracey seemed to be coming around. She no longer looked as eager as she usually did in classes. Harry was sure it would only be a few more days before his pretty brunette realized he was a complete fraud. Of course, he also had to wonder if Hannah still thought Lockhart was the greatest wizard since Merlin.

"Sorry Professor, but I have a lot of work to do," Harry said hurriedly. "Maybe some other time."

"Wait! But you don't even know what I wanted!" said Lockhart as Harry took off at a much more hurried pace.

In effort to ensure Lockhart couldn't track him somehow, Harry made his way around the castle, taking several rarely used twists and turns before deciding to head to the common room. However, as he made his way there, he was stopped by the Weasley twins who appeared in front of him. He eyed the two as they grinned at him.

"So, Harry, what did you think of our prank this morning?"



"Pretty good, if we do say so ourselves."

"Definitely one of our better pranks."

"Mighty difficult to prank a teacher you know."

"But I believe we did so admirably."

"So it was you," Harry said as he looked at the pair of red heads.  
"You two almost got me in a heap of trouble, you know."

The twins had the decency to look abashed. "We are sorry about that," said Fred.

"Indeed, had we known he would react like that, we would have chosen someone else to play our prank on."

"Perhaps Malfoy, though I think Snape would have assumed that was you as well."

"But hey! At least you didn't get in trouble."

"Yes, and now that we have shown you are skill it is time for you to bow down to our superiority."

"You don't think I would actually do something like that, do you?" asked Harry with a grin. "No, you've shown me your talent, but I have yet to show you everything I can do."

"You propose a competition then?" asked George.

With a giddy look Fred said, "that actually sounds quite delightful."

"It would be nice to have someone who can challenge us in the pranking arena."

"Indeed my dear Gred, having someone to try and measure up to us will be a grand way to test our skills."

The two looked at Harry and in unison said, "challenge accepted."

"But don't think we'll go easy on you."

"Yes, we certainly wouldn't want you thinking that."

"Especially since we have seen the masterful abilities you have when it comes to pranking."

"In that case," said Harry, interrupting the pair. "May the best man win."

XoX

I apologize for this being a day late. I was so tired from work yesterday that I forgot to post it. That being said, here is the new chapter.

Now a few people might be finding Harry entering a pranking competition with the twins to be out of character. However, he does have a reason for doing this, which you will learn next chapter.

Anyways, I hope everyone enjoyed this new chapter, because unfortunately, you guys might not be getting one for a while. The rest of my chapters are actually being looked over by my Beta reader. He told me he was going to try and get them out quickly, but to be honest, I would prefer he take his time and send me good work, then half ass it trying to push the chapters out as fast as possible and making the chapters not as good. I would prefer to receive a single, well written beta'd chapter, then get a really crappy beta'd chapter and have to resend it, or make all the corrections myself, which is a problem because I wouldn't be sending it to a beta reader if I knew what those corrections were.

Pokemaster 12, out.

## Chapter 11: Lather, Rinse, Repeat

XoX

The next two weeks or so saw a string of pranks rocking the school. No one knew who was behind these pranks, there was no evidence of who committed them, and in many cases it was if the person doing them was a ghost. They left nothing behind for anyone to figure out who did it.

It all started after the day that Severus Snape had been pranked with the farting chair. The very next day the entire teacher faculty had been pranked with a rather ingenious reversed age line, a modified version of an age line which was used to prevent people under a certain age from passing over it. This age line however, had been modified and was designed to prevent people over a certain age from passing through. Basically, anyone that was not a student could not pass through and were thrown out violently, as several of the school's Professors found out when they tried to cross it.

It was early in the morning, and Harry and his friends were all eating and chatting away happily. While he spoke to Lisa about one of the few good wizarding fiction stories, strangely enough it was one of the few about Merlin, the raven haired youth was also able to use a very discreet bit of wandless magic to send a small sheet of paper over towards the Gryffindor table. The paper landed in front of the Weasley twins, who blinked as they took a look at it's contents. They looked over towards him and Harry grinned, nodding his head towards Professor Babbling who was just now walking into the room, then nodding towards the table. Understanding dawned in the twins' eyes, and they grinned before turning their attention towards the Ancient Runes teacher as she walked to the table.

As Professor Babbling walked towards the table, a light and slightly transparent film shimmered in front of her. "What the -" she exclaimed a bit as she stumbled backwards a few steps. Looking at the now shimmering bubble the Ancient Rues Professor blinked several times before taking out her wand and began casting spells on the bubble.

"I wonder what's going on at the teacher's table," said Hannah as she watched Professor Babbling get joined by Professors Sinistra and Vector. As the three began conferring with each other, speaking

in hushed tones, the blond Hufflepuff turned to Harry and asked, "do you know what that bubble is?"

"Not a clue," replied Harry, carefully avoiding eye contact with Hannah. "However, it looks like some form of advanced magic. Maybe a barrier of some kind."

"Uh huh," Tracey said slyly as she noticed Harry not looking at Hannah when he spoke. She leaned over and grinned at him. "And you have no clue how it got there?"

Harry gave her a smile that was simply too innocent to be real as he replied, "not a one."

"Riiight."

Just then Gilderoy Lockhart came rushing in. He looked like he was in hurry since he had yet to even notice the shimmering bubble that was keeping the other teacher's from getting to the teachers table. However, the other professors that had been trying to figure out a way to dispel the reversed age linedid notice him.

"Gilderoy wait!" shouted Sinistra as she saw Lockhart rushing towards the barrier.

"Sorry Sinistra, no time to talk!" Lockhart called just as he hit the bubble. "I've got many things to do today, quizzes to prep and – WOA!" Lockhart's words became a loud scream as the bubble that he had run into stretched, right before snapping back like a slingshot. As Harry watched Lockhart soar through the air, he was reminded of a muggle scientist named Sir Isaac Newton, who came up with the laws of motion: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

That particular law, which was a modification of Kepler's third law, came into play here. When Lockhart had hit the barrier, it was stretched to it's tautest point. However, because it could not break, something needed to give...that something just happened to be Lockhart. The Defense Professor had been lifted off his feet and flew somewhere around fifteen, maybe twenty feet into the air by Harry's estimation, before landing on his back with a rather loud smack.

As the professors all went over to see if Lockhart was alright, Harry and his friends met the Defense Teacher's misfortune with varied reactions. Hannah looked torn between wanting to check if Lockhart was alright and angry; Harry was sure if she found out who placed that reverse aging line around the teacher's table, that person would be in a lot of trouble. Susan, Mandy, and Hermione looked mildly worried, while Daphne, Blaise, Lisa, Terry, Neville, and Padma either held back smirks or covered a hand to their face so their snickers wouldn't be heard. Out of everyone, Tracey's response was the most noticeable.

"Hahahahaha! Did you see that?" she asked between laughs. "That was the coolest thing I've seen this year to date!"

"I'm glad to see that you seem to have gotten over that ridiculous school girl crush of yours," Daphne commented with a smirk, her eyes actually holding some emotion other than the glacial cold they normally did when it public. "I would have been rather disappointed had you persisted in holding such a childish crush for a fraud."

"Oh, shut up," Tracey mumbled, her face red at the reminder of how her feelings for Lockhart had been near the beginning of the year. Harry choked back a laugh at the brunette's expense, but he must not have done a good job because she turned a glare on him.

"Oh my, what's this?" came the squeaky voice of Professor Flitwick. The Diminutive Professor walked over towards the bubble and began casting several charms on it. "What a marvelous little spell!" he said, looking positively giddy.

"You know what this is, Professor Flitwick?" asked Professor Sinistra.

"Oh yes, this is an age line," said Professor Flitwick. "However, it has been heavily modified. Rather than allow someone over a specific age to enter, it only let's someone under a certain age to enter. I suppose you could call it a reverse age line – a very nifty modification, and a rather complicated one at that. The age line itself is a difficult charm, I can't imagine what went into modifying it."

"Indeed," everyone's attention was brought from Professor Flitwick to Dumbledore, who had just walked in to hear Flitwick's explanation of the charm used to keep the teachers away from their table.

Dumbledore seemed to have an extra twinkle in his eyes as he looked at the reverse age line. "A most extraordinary use of magic, whoever did this must be a very skilled wizard." For just a second, the old headmaster's eyes fell on Harry, who was sure that the man knew he had cast the charm. However, the aging yet still powerful wizard's eyes didn't linger as he looked at Flitwick and smiled. "It's such a shame we have no clue who made this, I would very much like to speak with them about how they created this beautiful piece of magic."

"Indeed."

There had been many more pranks than just the one. Less than a day after the reverse age line prank, someone had spiked everyone's pumpkin juice with some kind of potion that caused them all to dance an Irish jig during dinner. Only those from Harry's group had escaped the prank, and even then it was only because of the enchanted jewelry that Harry had given to Daphne, Tracey, Hannah and Lisa last Christmas. Though Snape had tried to use their not being pranked as evidence in order to get Harry in trouble, all of them had been willing to claim they would be willing to take Veritaserum to prove they had nothing to do with the prank. Thankfully, Dumbledore had put a stop to the whole fiasco before Snape could actually get the powerful truth serum.

Two days after that, another prank had been set up, this one being done in a well used corridor of Hogwarts, the one that everyone had to take to get to Transfiguration class. It seemed someone had charmed the entire corridor so that whenever someone entered it would play their "theme song" a song picked out from a mixture of muggle and wizarding music that matched the particular physical and/or mental attributes of someone. A good example would be when Professor McGonagall herself got tagged and the song Stray Cat Blues by the Rolling Stones would play, an even better example would be when Snape got hit and the Imperial March from Star Wars started playing, complete with Darth Vader's heavy mechanical breathing. It was just unfortunate that only the muggle and half-bloods were able to understand the significance of the music, though everyone at least managed to find some entertainment in it.

Many people might have assumed these pranks were simply designed by a juvenile mind for the sake of entertainment. And while

that might be true for some people, Harry had an entirely different reason for committing them.

The Weasley Twins. The two trouble makers of Hogwarts would be incredibly useful to his plans. They were inventive, intelligent, and ambitious. He had seen some of the items they had created, many of which was actually far more advanced than the standard Curriculum. If Harry could get such ambitious and inventive people to respect him, when the time came, he would not only have a leg in for whatever they planned on doing, but could quite possibly help direct their ingenuity into projects that Harry himself desired. Yes, the two would be incredibly useful in any future endeavor he might set for himself.

Pranks were not the only thing that Harry had done during this time. While they had their purpose. Most of the pranks were the work of the twins, with Harry having only done a total of two in the two weeks. Though, in his humble opinion, both exceeded the ones the twins had done.

His main focus was, as always, his independent study. He was beginning to get the hang of alchemy and had managed to create several simple transmutation circles. Most of them were circles that were designed to repair objects, he had even crafted an all purpose transmutation circle that would allow him to repair any object by taking in the surrounding materials from whatever was under the circle. It was a basic but ingenious creation, one Harry hoped he would be able to modify for future use.

That was not to say he only studied and worked on his own either. He still spent quite a bit of his time with his friends, and he still helped other students when they needed so long as he was available. His work load wasn't very large, thanks to the fact that he had read all of his school work in advance he only needed to write the required essays. It had been his hope that without the need to work on his schoolwork he would be able to spend more time accomplishing his other pursuits and keeping in touch with the rest of the students.

Not much had changed from Harry's first year at Hogwarts; if he were honest, Harry almost felt as if he had never really left. He still hung out with the group of people he had befriended in his first year, spending what free time he had with them in the Common Room, or

outside in the courtyards. Several of his friends, namely Blaise and Terry had complained that nothing exciting had happened this year.

While his two friends may have been looking forward to him doing something exciting, or being caught up in some sort of life and death incident, Harry was just glad nothing had happened.

That was not to say life at Hogwarts was boring. While there had been no life or death situations, there had been plenty of other incidents that, in Harry's most humble opinion, were just as interesting.

Like Quidditch practice for example.

Quidditch season was starting up soon and Oliver Wood, the moderately insane Gryffindor Quidditch captain with mild sociopathic tendencies – or at least Harry thought so because the man was bloody insane – had decided that his team would be getting up at the crack of dawn so they could get an early start on their training.

Harry, who had actually just been coming in from his own work out with Neville had been accosted by the man almost as soon as he had entered the Gryffindor Common Room.

"Harry!" Oliver said as he and a tired Fred, George, Katie, Alicia and Angelina all stood behind him. Unlike the Gryffindor Captain who was nearly bouncing on the balls of his feet in excitement and repressed energy, the other members of the team looked decidedly tired and irritated.

Before Harry could even come up with a proper greeting, the sixth year had grabbed him by the arm and began dragging him back outside of the entrance he had just come through seconds prior.

"I'm glad your already up and at em," Oliver continued with great enthusiasm. Meanwhile, Harry was just trying to figure out what was happening. Not noticing, or even caring to notice, the younger man's plight, the Quidditch Captain continued. "It's time for Quidditch practice. Now, I've got this whole new schedule set up for us that I –"

"Um... Oliver," Harry started.



"– So from now on we're going to be working harder then ever to –"

"Oliver."

"– I'm telling you, this year is going to be –"

"WOOD!"

Oliver stopped at the sound of his last name being shouted out. He looked around for a moment, trying to find the source of the voice, before Harry, annoyed and irritated said, "could you explain to me why I'm being dragged through the corridor and outside?"

Wood blinked. He was obviously confused, figuring that the reasons should have been obvious. "Why, Quidditch practice of course!"

Harry had to stop himself from trying to strangle the man. He had just gotten back from his own training, and now this maniac wanted him to train some more. On top of that he had not told Harry anything about starting practice so early in the year.

If there was one thing Harry hated it was when the unexpected happened.

Still, the much younger student managed to restrain his admittedly violent urge to do the much larger Oliver Wood bodily harm. "Yes, I understand that," Harry said irritably. Fred and George, now at least somewhat awake, chuckled at the younger boys plight, earning them both a heated glare. "What I meant was, why are you dragging me out here, when I just got back from my own training, without allowing me to get into my Quidditch robes and without my broom?"

It was then that Oliver Wood seemed to realize that Harry was not only not wearing his red and gold Quidditch robes like everybody else, he was also shirtless, sweaty and dirty, with several patches of dirt on his training shorts, chest and back.

On another note, Katie Bell, Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson were very impressed that a young boy of twelve had such an outstanding physique, if the mild blushes on their faces were anything to go by.

"Oh, right... well go on upstairs and get dressed and get your broom. Then meet us on the field."

Harry grit his teeth, he really just wanted to get showered and begin working on his projects, but there was nothing to be done about it. When Wood was like this, you either went with it, or got extra practice with him, which was even worse than his normal practice.

So he did the only thing he really could do, nod, agree and move on his way. He made it back up to the portrait of the fat lady, who upon seeing him raised an eyebrow.

"Didn't you just come in a little while ago?"

"Yes, well, I have a crazy Quidditch Captain who felt the need to drag me off before I could get dressed." Harry coughed into his hand. Truth be told he felt mildly embarrassed about being manhandled like that.

He was almost tempted to prank the man into oblivion.

"Do you think you could let me in?"

"Password?"

Harry sighed. "Lorem Ipsum."

The portrait of the Fat Lady swung open, allowing Harry to enter the common room. And almost as soon as he did he ran into another problem.

"I thought I heard someone yelling your name, Harry! Look what I've got here! I've had it developed, I wanted to show you –"

Collin Creevy, camera swinging madly around his neck, ran up to Harry almost the moment he had entered the common room. He more or less descended upon Harry like a vulture, waving a photo madly in his hand before brandishing it under the raven-haired student's nose.

Harry was not quite sure what to make of Collin Creevy, the boy seemed to be absolutely obsessed with him, to the point that it was actually creepy and Harry had entertained thoughts of getting a

restraining order on the boy multiple times. If it wouldn't have ruined his reputation as a model student who was nice and willing to lend anyone an ear, he would have.

Not wanting his sterling reputation to be ruined, and wanting to get passed Collin in the most effective and efficient way possible without ruining his reputation, he took a look at the photo in the boys hand.

It was one of him and Collin, standing in front of the Gryffindor Common room. Harry had allowed him to take that picture on the condition that the first year only took photos of Harry on certain days when he was not busy. While Harry wanted to be nice – and subsequently keep his reputation intact – he didn't want the kid bothering him every chance he got.

"That's nice Collin, you have a talent in photography," Harry complimented, getting the younger boy to beam. "Now, while I would love to stay and chat, Oliver is expecting me on the Quidditch pitch in a few minutes for practice so..."

"Do you think I could come?"

"Um..." Harry was thrown off for a second, even though he knew he probably shouldn't be. Collin would have loved taking pictures of Harry while he was practicing. Thinking quickly he came up with most plausible excuse he could think as to why the boy could not come with him to practice. "I don't think Wood will allow it. He's pretty harsh when it comes to non-team students watching practice."

"Oh..." the boy looked pretty depressed about that. Harry would have pat the boy on the head, but considering how dirty he was, refrained.

Instead he did his best to cheer the kid up with words. "Don't get too down, while you won't be able to take pictures during practice. You'll be able to get better ones during an actual game."

His words seemed to work because Collin bounced right back up and became cheerful again. "You're right Harry! Thanks!"

"No problem, see you later Collin."

"Bye!"

Harry sighed as he made it to his dorm room. Once there he pulled out his wand from its hidden holster on his arm. Waving it over himself all of the mud, sweat and grime that had covered him evaporated into nothingness, he would have liked to enjoy a good shower, but since he was only going to be getting sweaty again, decided it wouldn't be a good idea.

After he was clean he waved his wand at his trunk. The dial on his lock turned to the compartment he wanted and the lid opened. Seconds later his robes and his broom flew out of the trunk. The broom leaned itself against his bed, while the robes flew into his hands.

As he was getting dressed Neville, hair still wet from getting out of the shower, walked into the room and saw him changing. The boy snickered, and Harry sent him a mild glare. "Don't. say. a word," he grumbled, causing the round-faced boy to clamp a hand over his mouth, most likely in an attempt to keep from laughing.

It was as Harry was just leaving that Neville called out, "good luck at Quidditch practice," making the raven haired youth sigh.

It didn't take Harry long after that to leave the castle and making to the Quidditch changing rooms. All of the other members seemed to still be half-asleep as he entered the room. The twins, beyond snickering when they noticed him again, were looking puffy eyed and touslehaired. They were sitting next to Alicia, who looked like she was about to nod off at any second. Her fellow chasers were yawning side by side opposite of them.

"There you are, Harry, what kept you?" Harry had to hold in both his irritation and the snippy comeback that threatened to emerge from his throat. Thankfully, he managed to keep them both on a tight leash and Wood soon continued. "Now, I wanted a quick talk with you all before we actually get onto the field, because I spent the summer devising a whole new training program, which I really think will make all the difference..."

At this point Harry tuned the insane Quidditch captain out, mostly, he would remember everything that was said here whether he wanted to or not. Instead, he turned his mental capacity to other pursuits while Wood droned on and on.

"So," realizing Wood was nearing the end of his speech, Harry refocused his full attention back on the man. "Is that clear? Any questions?"

"I've got a question, Oliver," said George, who had woken with a start. "Why couldn't you have told us all this yesterday when we were awake?"

While Wood looked like he was about to burst a blood vessel, Harry had to hold in a snicker.

"Now, listen here, you lot," Wood said, glowering at all of them. "We should have won the Quidditch Cup last year. We're easily the best team. But unfortunately – owing to circumstance beyond our control –"

Harry knew Wood was talking about him. How he had been unconscious in the hospital wing for the final match of the previous year, which meant that Gryffindor had been a player short and had suffered the worst defeat in three-hundred years.

Not that Harry would let himself get blamed. What he had done was necessary to cover his tracks, and he had gotten to fight Voldemort. Seeing how powerful that man was when he was at his weakest had really been an eye opener. Harry would need to get much stronger since he knew the Dark Lord would not let this defeat go lightly.

Wood took a moment to regain control of himself. It was clear that their last defeat was still torturing him greatly.

"So this year we train harder than ever before... Okay, let's go and put our new theories into practice!" Wood shouted, seizing his broomstick and leading the way out of the locker rooms. Harry felt like groaning, but managed to keep it in if barely, as he and the ragged looking members of his team followed Wood out.

They had been in the locker room so long that the sun was completely up now, although remnants of mist hung over the grass in the stadium. As Harry walked onto the field he saw a smirking Neville standing beside a slightly tired Hermione Granger near the stands.

"Don't, say, a word," Harry growled menacingly.

Neville rolled his eyes before chuckling slightly. It was very amusing to him to watch Harry getting thrown off his game. Normally, the raven-haired youth was so unflappable that seeing him so... unnerved and irritated was a treat.

"I'm not saying anything," Neville replied, holding his hands in the air. "Though, I am surprised you guys aren't done yet."

"Done? We haven't even gotten started," Harry grumbled. Gods he really hated this. He was sore, and hungry, and seeing Neville and Hermione eating some toast and marmalade that they had gotten from the Great Hall was making him jealous.

And he didn't even like eating that unhealthy crap.

Heaving a deep sigh, Harry mounted his broom and shot into the air. For a single, solitary moment, Harry allowed a smile to cross his face. For some reason, no matter how irritated he was, he had to admit that it felt good to be back in the air again.

The moment only lasted for a second, however, as Oliver soon had them running through the new drills he had created. Most of them centered around complicated offensive plays that involved a lot of teamwork. The good thing about these drills, in Harry's opinion at least, was that many of the plays involved him somehow. After having seen how effective he was at disrupting their opponents formations during their first ever game, Wood had decided to include him in all of their plays there after.

However, things were about to get tense.

"Hey, Wood!" Called George. When Oliver turned to look at him, he said, "did Slytherin book the pitch?"

Confused, Wood answered, "no, why?"

"Because they're here." George pointed over to several people in green robes, brooms in hand, walking onto the field.

"I don't believe it!" Wood hissed in outrage. "I booked the field for today! We'll see about this!"

Harry frowned as Wood shot towards the ground and quickly followed. When he reached the bottom his hand lightly touched the back of his broom and he pushed himself off, landing gracefully on the ground while at the same time causing the broom to stand on end. He grabbed it in one smooth motion and positioned it over his shoulder.

Fred and George landed a few seconds later much more normally.

"Flint!" Wood bellowed at the Slytherin Captain. "This is our practice time! We got up specially! You can clear off now!"

Marcus Flint was even larger than Wood. He had a look of trollish cunning on his face as he replied, "plenty of room for all of us, Wood."

By this time Angelina, Alicia and Katie had come over as well. There were no girls on the Slytherin team, not that Harry expected there to be. From what Tracey had told him, many people in Slytherin held a gender biased when it came to sports, much to the girls frustration when Flint would not let her try out for the team.

"But I booked the field!" By now Wood was positively spitting with rage. If looks could kill, Flint would have been filleted on the spot. "I booked it!"

"Ah," Flint had a positively vicious gleam in his eyes as he pulled out a sheet of paper. "But I've got a specially signed note here from Professor Snape. 'I, Professor S. Snape, give the Slytherin team permission to practice today owing to the need to train a new Seeker.'"

"You've got a new Seeker," said Wood, his distraction halting his rage. "Where?"

From behind the six, hulking figures of the Slytherin team came a seventh, much smaller figure, a large smirk on his pointed face. It was Draco Malfoy.

"Aren't you Lucius Malfoy's son?" asked Fred, disdain lacing his voice as he glared at the blond ferret-y looking boy.

"Funny you should mention Draco's father," Flint said as the whole Slytherin team gained a broad smile. "Let me show you the generous gift he's made to the Slytherin team."

All seven of them held out their broomsticks. Seven, highly polished, brand-new handles and seven sets of fine gold lettering spelling out the words Nimbus Two Thousand and One gleamed under the Gryffindors' noses in the early morning sun.

"Very latest model. Only came out last month," said Flint carelessly, flicking a speck of dust from the end of his own. "I believe it outstrips the old Two Thousand series by a considerable amount. As for the old Cleansweeps" — he smiled nastily at Fred and George, who were both clutching Cleansweep Fives — "sweep the board with them."

For a moment there was silence as the Gryffindor team stared at the Slytherin's. A noise soon came, however, and it was laughter.

Turning, everyone looked to see Harry chuckling and snorting as he looked at the brooms.

"Something funny, scarhead?" asked Malfoy with a scowl.

Harry didn't let the boy's insults get to him. Honestly, he couldn't. Draco was simply so nonthreatening that Harry couldn't help but find more amusement in the boy's threats — which in Harry's opinion were positively dreadful and lacking in imagination — than anything else.

"Oh, not at all," Harry replied, smiling widely. "I just find it amusing that you had to buy your way onto the team. What, did you realize you suck so much on a broom that you had to have daddy pay off your new... teammates, with these new brooms?"

Draco's face flushed purple as the members of the Gryffindor team began snickering.

"I'll show you, Potter," Malfoy sneered as he tried to regain his composure. "Just wait until our match comes. You'll see how good I am."

"Right, whatever you say, Malfoy," Harry replied with the air of someone who wasn't all that concerned. He turned his back on the



boy and looked at his teammates. "Well, I think we should clear off the day. The Slytherin team needs to train their new Seeker," smiling slightly Harry turned his head and looked at Malfoy, "and considering who their new Seeker is, they're going to need all the practice they can get."

Malfoy grit his teeth and his hold on the broom tightened. However, Harry didn't look back, instead choosing to ignore the petulant boy. It wasn't long after Harry began walking off the pitch that the rest of the Gryffindor team followed his example. They may not have gotten their practice, but it always did their hearts good to see the Slytherin team look foolish.

As Harry was reaching the entrance to the castle, Hermione and Neville managed to catch up to him.

"What was all that about mate?" asked Neville as he walked on Harry's left.

Harry smiled broadly. "Oh, nothing much. It seems Malfoy has bought his way onto the Slytherin team. His daddy managed to buy the entire Slytherin team brand-new Nimbus Two Thousand and Ones."

"Really?" Neville went wide eyed, while Hermione just looked confused.

"I take it that's a new broom?" she asked.

"It's the newest Nimbus out," Neville breathed, still surprised but getting over it quickly. After all, buying his way onto the team via having his father buy the most powerful broom on the market was just like something Draco Malfoy would do.

"Yeah, so anyways, I have to see Professor McGonagall about something," Harry commented to the pair. "I'll meet up with you guys in the Common Room with everybody else, or barring that the Great Hall at lunch."

Hermione and Neville shared a look, clearly wondering what Harry needed to speak with Professor McGonagall about. Any thoughts they might have had, however, were shrugged off. This was Harry Potter after all, and he often did things that made no sense at first

but did later on. If he had to see Professor McGonagall about something, then it was probably about something he was doing. And if it was important he would tell them later on.

"Okay, bye Harry!"

"Later."

Parting ways with Neville and Hermione, who went in the general direction of the common room, Harry made a quick stop by the kitchens. His stomach had been protesting since the start of Quidditch practice and needed to be sated. He had never been able to think clearly or work properly on an empty stomach, and oftentimes even got irritable when hungry. Not just because having an empty stomach made thinking impossible, but also because he didn't want his muscles to deteriorate simply because he didn't get any carbohydrates and proteins to sustain them.

The house elves had been more than happy to fix him up three ham and cheese sandwiches, which he ate hurriedly as he made his way to Professor McGonagall's office.

Knocking on the door Harry had to wait for a moment, before the sound of footsteps came from the other side and the door opened to reveal Professor McGonagall a moment later.

"Yes? Mr. Potter, can I help you?" asked McGonagall as she looked at him in minor curiosity.

"Yes actually," Harry said. "You see I just thought up an interesting proposal that I think would be a boon to the school, and was hoping I could put it forward to you."

Professor McGonagall raised an eyebrow at the raven-haired youth, looking inquisitive. Harry just kept up his smile, not giving away what he was thinking.

A few seconds later, the Transfiguration Professor ushered him in. "Come in, Mr. Potter, and tell me about this proposition you have."

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It was nearly lunch by the time Harry had finished his conversation with Professor McGonagall. Despite the length of time it took for them to work out the details – and there had been a lot of details – with his proposal, he was rather pleased with how it went.

Making his way into the Great Hall, Harry took a moment to look around, and soon spotted his group of friends at the Gryffindor table today.

"We were wondering where you had gotten off to, Harry," Hannah said as soon as the person in question had walked over to them. As he sat down, the blond Hufflepuff girl looked at him with curious eyes. "What was so important that you had to talk to Professor McGonagall about it for two hours?"

"Oh, just something that I think will help the school," Harry replied with a slight smile.

Tracey looked over, saw the smile and smirked. "I know that look. What exactly have you done this time, Harry?"

"You'll just have to wait and see."

By now, everyone was looking at him curiously. Several of them tried their best to convince him to tell them what he had done, but Harry was having none of it, claiming that if he told them, it would ruin the surprise. This caused several grumbles, and all of the girls pouted, Tracey had even tried to get him to slip by giving him what would generally be referred to as puppy eyes. Essentially, she made her eyes go wide and somehow even managed to get them to water. It was actually a good tactic.

Too bad Harry had become desensitized to such tactics thanks to Lisa.

"I'm sorry, but there is nothing you can do to make me reveal my surprise," Harry said to the girl. "And I've had my friend, Lisa, use that on me one too many times for it to be effective." At this Lisa, who was sitting across from him next to Blaise blinked.

"I don't think I've ever done that to you... or anyone else for that matter."

"Ah ha, I meant my muggle friend, Lisa," Harry responded. The Lisa across from him blinked for a moment, before nodding.

Tracey still didn't seem very satisfied, however, Blaise, who was the only person that didn't try to get Harry to cough up his secret said, "I personally don't want him to tell us what he's done. It's much more exciting when stuff like this comes as a surprise."

"You would think that," Tracey huffed.

"By the way, Trace," Harry started, grabbing the girls attention and making her stop pouting. "I noticed that Draco became the new Seeker."

At this Tracey began to seethe. "He did, slimy little cockroach had his daddy buy his way onto the team!" If there was one thing Tracey hated it was to see her Quidditch disgraced like this. Entry onto the team should be earned by skill! Not the amount of money lining your daddy's pockets! Not only that, but she knew – they all knew – that it would just make things worse in the long run. Draco, for all his talk wasn't very talented on a broom. Above average? Yes. But nothing like what he bragged about.

And against someone like Harry who was more or less a natural, it wouldn't matter if his broom was a hundred times faster. He would still lose.

Lunch soon passed by in a blur. Harry and his friends chatted about anything and everything, most of it revolving around schoolwork, some of it revolved around listening to Tracey as she complained about Malfoy getting on a spot on the team when he hadn't earned it. This earned several groans from the others, especially from Daphne who had already heard enough of her friends ranting in their dorms.

When lunch ended everyone stood up, they began to make their way to the Common Room. However, Harry had some other plans.

"I have to take a book back to the library," he said. He also had to grab another book he wanted to read, but he already knew where it was. And since it was about his personal work in alchemy, he didn't want to inform anybody about that.

"Geez, Harry," Hannah complained, hands on her hips as she looked at him, exasperated. "The years only just started and here you are, running off to the library."

"Not even Hermione is that bad," Tracey added with a teasing grin. Hermione just rolled her eyes, she was already use to the other girls teasing remarks, and considering Tracey teased everybody it really didn't have any effect.

"I know, I know. Sorry, but I won't be long. I'll meet up with you guys in a few minutes."

Just about everyone rolled their eyes, but after a few quick good byes Harry was making his way to the library.

Walking into the library, Harry walked up to Madam Pince and pulled the book he had gotten out of his hand. It was a rather old book, with worn and frayed edges. On the front cover was a transmutation circle with a human male in the center of it. It was a book on alchemy, and one of the ones that Harry had found last year but didn't read because it was too advanced for him.

Setting the book down on the hardwood desk in front of Madam Pince he said, "I would like to return this book. I would also like access to the restricted section."

"Pass," the woman said as she looked at him with an imperious stare. Considering he had stared down Voldemort it wasn't all that effective.

Harry reached into his robes and pulled out his pass, showing it to the woman who sniffed before giving him a stiff nod.

Harry had to withhold a chuckle.

Ever since Harry and his friends had spent time in the library during first year, Madam Pince had taken a disliking to him. Harry wasn't quite sure why. Sure, when he and his friends had used the library as their place of study and just to generally spend time together, they had been somewhat loud. But that problem had long since been solved with the creation of the Common Room.

Though it could have something to do with the fact that he had access to the restricted section. Madam Pince was a firm believer in information not only being valuable, but also dangerous when placed within the wrong hands. To her, a child such as Harry being allowed access to the restricted section was just asking for trouble. It was a good thing for Harry that there was nothing she could do, or he was sure the woman would have denied him access by now.

When they reached the door to the restricted section, Madam Pince used her keys to unlock the door and pushed it open. She gave Harry one more glare, and said, "I don't think I need to tell you how dangerous it is there."

"Don't worry, I'll be careful," Harry replied, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. He walked through the door before the urge became too great to ignore. Walking down the many aisles in the restricted section, he took a moment to admire the many thousands of books that lined the walls.

This was easily one of his favorite spots on the whole castle. Not because of the books, well, sort of because of the books. It wasn't just that they were books, but what was inside of them that counted. Here, in this room was some of the most powerful knowledge on magic that could be found in all of Britain. A well-spring of information on many different branches of powerful and esoteric magic that few people would ever know of.

To be honest, Harry had no clue why this section even existed. Over 3/4ths of the books in this section contained knowledge on magic that had nothing to do with the Hogwarts curriculum. Hogwarts only offered courses on the basics, Astronomy, Charms, Defense, Herbology, History, Transfiguration and Potions; along with several elective courses that they would start taking their third year, Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures, Divination, and Muggle Studies.

Finally, there were the extra-curriculum subjects; Ancient Studies, the study of ancient magic and history from long ago, such as Egyptian magic used during the time of the pharaohs; Art, which teaches about Wizarding artwork, such as the living paintings that were all around Hogwarts; Earth Magic, the study of magic that involves the earth, soil and knowledge of the earth's ley lines and how they coincide with magic; Music, along with Muggle Music, both

of which Harry felt were self-explanatory; Ghoul Studies, which was a more advanced course that mixed Defense with Care of Magical Creatures; and finally, Alchemy, but it was nothing more than a basic introduction into the branch. Nothing at all like what Nicolas had taught him.

Less than a third of the books in the restricted section even mentioned those branches of magic. There were a few offshoot branches. Harry had found several books on enchanting, which was an offshoot and much more advanced version of charms. He had also found books on warding, which was a combination of Ancient Runes and Arithmancy, along with many other types of magic that were far too advanced for the average seventh year, let alone a second year like him to even comprehend.

Good thing Harry had never been average.

Those were just some of the subjects that could be found in the restricted section. There were many others, and not all of them were benevolent and good. While there was nothing that could truly be considered dark – if there was, Harry would have had to question the sanity of Dumbledore and the other teachers – there were quite a few books on spells that weren't all that pleasant.

Shaking his thoughts off, Harry walked down the aisle he knew his book to be. Eyes scanning the shelf he stopped at the one-hundredth book, and grabbed a book from the third shelf.

It was an old book, even more worn than the one he had been reading. The cover was so badly damaged that Harry couldn't even make out the title anymore.

But that suited him just fine. It wasn't the title that he cared about.

Making his way back out of the room, Harry passed by several aisles in a hurry.

At the same time, someone else was just stepping out of the aisle he was walking by, nose in a book, not paying attention to where she was going.

The results of this was her crashing into Harry's much sturdier frame. The raven-haired youth let out a startled grunt while the girl screamed, flinging her book into the air as she fell on her backside.

Acting on pure instinct, Harry caught the book in his hand. He looked at the title, absently noting it was a book on transfiguration, before turning to look at the girl he had knocked over.

Mandy winced as she rubbed her sore backside, positive that due to the way she had fallen it would leave a bruise. Grimacing she was about to stand up when a voice caught her attention.

"Are you alright, Mandy?"

Looking up Mandy blushed as she found herself staring at Harry Potter. He was holding out a hand, obviously for her to take, which she did, her blush increasing in hue and consistency.

Then she registered his words more fully and quickly spoke up. "I'm fine! I'm really sorry for bumping into you, I wasn't watching where I was going."

"It's fine," Harry waved off her attempts at apologizing with an amused smile. "I probably should have been paying more attention myself, so we'll just say it's both our faults. Oh," he held out the book that Mandy had thrown in the air. "You erm, dropped this."

"T-Thank you," Mandy took the book from him quickly. She was about to move away quickly, when Harry's next words stopped her.

"Would you like to spend some time with me and my friends in the Common Room?"

"Uh..." Mandy flushed. She did want to, that much was clear. Equally clear was that the girl was extremely shy and socially awkward.

It was actually kind of endearing.

"I-I would like to but um... I have a lot of homework to do."

"In that case it might be better to spend time with us," Harry said, undeterred. He wasn't quite sure why he was so adamant on having this girl join his group of friends, but even though he normally



thought out everything he did, listing all possible pros and cons before he did it, there were times when he could be just as impulsive as others. "In fact, if you'd like I could help you with your homework."

H-Help me?" Mandy squeaked. She looked like she was about to hide behind her book at any second.

"Yeah, you know it's always better to have someone with you to help correct any mistakes you might make, or add something you missed. So what do you say?"

"W-Well I guess it's ok..." the girl squirmed slightly under his gaze. Once more Harry felt himself mildly amused by the girls innate shyness.

"Alright then, why don't we just check these books out and head over to the common room?"

"Ok."

As the two went over to Madam Pince, who had been glaring at them since Mandy screamed, they never noticed a set of jealous brown eyes.

XoX

So, before you all leave this chapter with a review... or not, I would just like to say that I did get T.E. Tanglebrook's permission to use the reverse age line prank from his story. I am telling you this so that you A) know who the prank came from and B) do not flame my ass to oblivion for plagiarizing.

That being said, I hope you all enjoyed the chapter.

Chp27